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HISTORY OF IRELAND:

CRITICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL.

VOL. I.

BY

STANDISH O'GRADY,

EX-SCHOLAR TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN;
GOLD MEDALIST OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY.

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PREFACE.

THE books* already published by me on this subject are portions of a work in which I propose to tell the history of Ireland through the medium of tales, epical or romantic, written with the object of bringing remote times and men vividly before the mind's eye, and within the reach of common human sympathies.

The work, of which the present is the first volume, belongs to an altogether different order of historical composition, and is critical, not constructive or imaginative. Where I seem to quote, the quotations are literal translations supplied by competent scholars, and where I seem to give the effect, that effect has been gathered by me from such literal translations and may be rigidly deduced from them.

Some pages and passages which have already appeared in the former series, but which would seem rather to belong to this, have been transferred and republished here.

M. & C. in the references stand for "Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish," by O'Curry. MS. Materials—for "MS. for Irish History," by the same Author. Pub. Oss. So., for "Publications of the Ossianic Society."

STANDISH O'GRADY,
11 Lower Fitzwilliam Street, Dublin.

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HISTORY OF IRELAND.

PART I.

PRE-HISTORIC IRELAND.

Testimony of Rock and Cave.

CHAPTER I.

PLEISTOCENE IRELAND.

OF planetary epochs, the Eocene and Miocene have slowly receded into the past, their huge cycles having been accomplished, and the Pleistocene, with new tribes of animals, and amongst them one destined to the mastery of the rest, is advancing over North-Western Europe. The uncouth monsters to whom Cuvier and others have affixed names as uncouth as themselves, have disappeared. The hipparion, a delicate equine creature, will not dart through the woods any more. The mastadon, both that which made its den in the woods, and that which housed itself in caves, will not shake the earth again. The stag of Polignac, the early field-bear, the megatherium, the trogothierium, are all gone. The pleisiosaurus, king of the lizard tribe, will not enjoy the heat of the sun any more. His horrid length he has committed to the safe-keeping of the mud, that will one day be marble. In due time he will be disinterred, and assigned an honourable place in the museum. The two first cycles

▲

of the modern geological era have passed away. Time, the old scene-shifter, alters the world's stage, a new act begins, and new actors appear.

Pleistocene Europe was not what it is at the present day. There was then no Mediterranean inlet from the Atlantic. There were then no British Isles. Between Africa and Europe there was communication at two points : Algiers met Spain at Gibraltar, and where there is now a strait, there was then an isthmus; from the toe of Italy to Sicily, and from that to Morocco, ran a broad belt of land, dividing the Mediterranean into two great lakes. In the Pleistocene epoch, the Thames, the Rhine, and the Elbe were but tributaries of a mighty river that flowed northward, draining the great plain between England and Scandinavia, over which roll now the waves of the German Ocean. This mighty stream, receiving the Humber and the Forth in its course, emptied itself into the Arctic Ocean hundreds of miles to the north of Scotland. Then the Suir, the Nore, and the Barrow, uniting their waters with the Bandon and the Lee, flowed southwards till they met the Seine, by whom they were borne on to the Atlantic, into which they poured their giant waters many miles to the south-west of what we now term Cape Clear. Then the Liffey, running eastward, met the Mersey from England and the Clyde from Scotland, and uniting, ran northward, till their combined current met the Arctic waters many miles beyond the remotest of the Isles of Orc.

Such was north-western Europe when it was first occupied by man, such the region out of which Ireland was carved.

As the mastadon and his brood of earth-shaking and reptile brethren disappeared, new tribes of living creatures began to swarm up from the south and down from the north. With the varying temperature altered too the kinds of animals that took possession of these countries. Sometimes the thick-skinned rhinoceros would wander up this way from his African haunts ; at others his woolly cousin would wander down from Siberia or Scandinavia, and with him the musk-sheep and the deer of the northern latitudes. In the hyena caves lie mingled pell-mell the bones of animals native to the torrid and to the frozen zones.

And now, too, came the Irish elk, whose raised antlers stood twenty feet from the ground—came the mammoth, with long curving tusks and flowing mane that swept the ground—came the cave-bear, the fox, and the wolf—the bison still wild in America, the urus still preserved in Germany—came the primitive horse with his enormous head, the lion, and tiger, and hyenas in their troops hunting down both lion and tiger, when no grass-eating animals were to be had—new varieties of deer and of elephants, the wild boar, and a strange brute half lion half tiger, with broad flat tusks notched like a saw along the edges, his name machcerodus or sabre-tooth. And now, too, came another animal not yet extinct nor like to be until the planet itself becomes uninhabitable. Sabre-tooth did not slay him ; he escaped the banded hyenas ; and to-day he examines the serrated edges of sabre-tooth's great tusks, and carries the hyena from village to village as a curiosity.

CHAPTER II.

GLACIALIS IERNÉ.

DURING the Pleistocene epoch, and prior to the arrival of man in this portion of the world, owing, as is supposed, to a violent eccentricity of the earth's orbit, the ice and snow of the Arctic regions invaded Europe. The cold was still further intensified by the contemporaneous divergence of the course of the Gulf Stream. The severe heat of ensuing summers, which was one of the consequences of that eccentricity, was powerless to melt to any great extent the ice and snow which had so far transcended their normal bounds. The raised mists stood thick and dense above the ice, down to which the struggling sunbeams could not penetrate. Year by year the ice frontier crept steadily downward. Rain-clouds from the south wafted northwards, deposited their humid burthens, in the form of snow and hail, in those cold latitudes, upon the gradually extending Arctic domains.

The warm atmosphere which had produced the rich vegetation of the earlier Pleistocene epoch was now growing every year more cold. The tropical animals disappeared altogether from North-Western Europe, and creatures of Arctic origin began to occupy these regions as their natural habitation. The mammoth, the woolly rhinoceros, and the reindeer became more and more frequent, and each winter stayed a longer season, as the highlands became more and more capped with perpetual snow. It was now, too, that man made his appearance in this portion of the world.

The rough stone arrow-heads and knives which are discovered in the deeper strata of the caves were dropped there by a people which came into Europe with the great and permanent invasion of the Arctic animals, who stayed here as long as they, and who retreated at the same time. This people descended into Europe because the growing cold had driven them southwards, and because the animals upon whom they lived were moving southwards too, and they retreated from Europe, either because the growing heat drove them northwards, together with the animals which formed their subsistence, or because they were expelled by the advent of new races of man, who, as the frost powers retreated to the north, took gradual possession of the whole of Europe.

As the climate of these countries grew colder, the forms of vegetation native to warm and temperate climates died away, and their places were taken by the hardy lichens of the north. Year by year the winter snow upon the hill-tops lasted longer into the spring, until at last upon our highlands there was no thaw, and the mountains were capped with perpetual snow.

And now, as century succeeded century, and the ice increased in mass and stretched down into the plains, great glaciers, huge rivers of slow-moving ice, began to push down into the valleys, making for the lowlands and the sea. Glaciers, moving slowly over the whole face of the country for many thousands of years, have left behind universal and indelible traces. Plains were scooped and hollowed out, and the substance borne onward by the ice was deposited far away at the point at which the thaw had dissolved the ice and strewn the boulder clay and stones over the ground.

The tops of the mountains were worn away and polished as with fine sand-paper, their bases grooved and chiselled by the abrading power of the ice. What happens to-day in Switzerland happened then over Ireland and all North-Western Europe—in, summer mighty torrents, the solution of snow and ice, and in winter long, crawling glaciers, planing down the country, polishing the mountains. At last the ice became too vast and the climate too cold to admit any thaw, the hardiest of the Arctic animals and plants were obliged to disappear; the seal-hunters passed southwards into France and Spain, and the whole of this country, which we now call Ireland, was buried under a dense and impenetrable incubus of ice. The ignorant epithet of the Roman writer was then indeed deserved, when even the Eskimo and the reindeer had to flee from her icy coasts. She was then indeed *Glacialis Ierné*.

CHAPTER III.

MEN OF THE ICE PERIOD.

THE man of the ice-period was the antique representative of the modern Eskimo, if not actually his progenitor. He was short, flat-faced, and prognathous. He was filthy, brutish, and a cannibal. Fishing and hunting formed his occupation. The divine command to till the earth and to eat of the fruits thereof had not been enjoined upon his ancestors, or had not been obeyed, nor yet did he drive about flocks and herds,

leading a nomadic and pastoral life, and subsisting on the milk of cows or mares. No gentle domestic animals roamed around his house. The wolf was still untamed. No watch-dog's honest bark greeted him as he drew near home.

Ignorant, filthy, and brutish as was this ancient man, yet him, too, the gods had visited. Prometheus and Apollo had taught him many arts by which he might mitigate the cruelty of the frost powers. The divine theft had brought a blessing upon him too. He knew how to kindle a fire, and supply himself with the warmth which the climate denied.

To the potter's art he had not attained. When he desired to boil his food, a deer-skin was his pot, into which, filled with melted snow, he dropped red-hot stones until the flesh was cooked.

He had his needles of bone and thread of gut, and made raiment for himself out of skins.

When he desired to build, he sought a ravine where the snow lay deep. Removing the surface out of the compact snow beneath, he, with his stone hatchet, hewed bricks or slabs out of the solid snow. With these he built his habitation, shaped like a beehive, with door, and a window of transparent ice. Inside, all along the white walls, ran banks of snow, upon which were thrown skins, and upon these the family lay and slept.

In a French cave, in the strata of the Pleistocene era, has been found the shoulder-blade of an animal, upon which is graved with some pointed instrument a fine representation of the mammoth, and also another of the primitive horse. There, too, has been found a piece of horn, carved into the shape of a deer's head,

with branching antlers, executed with faithfulness and spirit.

Deep in the recesses of the caves we learn the history and life of this ancient people. The excavation of a few feet reveal articles manufactured under the sway and genius of Rome. Below these we find the iron and bronze implements of the half-civilized predecessors of the Romans. Another descent brings to light the flint tools of the Neolithic and Palæolithic times. Then come the marks of the great submergence, and below them the tools of this people who, more than two hundred thousand years ago, lived and died upon the plains of Ireland. Below these again, and upon the basement of this strange house—this eternal refuge of the homeless—lie the pulverized or demi-pulverized relics of the vast cycles, huge and obscure, that preceded the advent of man. They are the annals of the world, tome above tome, in that strange library.

CHAPTER IV.

IERNÉ REDIVIVA.

IRELAND lies now buried beneath a load of impenetrable ice. Man, animals, and plants have been gradually driven southwards into France and Spain before the steady and insupportable advance of the frost-powers. But now another huge alteration began to take place. North-Western Europe descended gradually into the sea. As with a vast millennial aspiration, the earth's bosom fell. Steadily as the

land sank the sea rose. Thus, as Great Britain and Ireland are but the highlands of a great plateau, a time arrived at which the rest of the plateau being submerged, the British Isles appeared on the breast of the Atlantic in the same form that they present to-day. But the huge suspiration had not yet ceased. Still deeper the earth sank, still higher the waters rose, till at last only the tops of the mountains showed here and there, and all Ireland was rolled over by the waves of the Atlantic.

But the end was not yet. Ireland, tenanted only by shell-fish and sea-weeds, above which the whale wallowed and the frequent iceberg sailed, was destined to ascend from her watery grave into the light of the sun, to be a joyful home of men and animals, and to play her part in the great drama of the world. That vast planetary suspiration ceased, an inspiration as vast commenced, and North-Western Europe rose again slowly, millennium after millennium, inch by inch, through the centuries, rose even to the height of the early Pleistocene epoch, and then subsided once more to the point at which the historic period found her.

All this time the frost-powers still reigned. Ireland but emerged from the water to be buried under a still more barren incubus of ice. But at last their cruel grasp began to grow faint ; genial influences from the south penetrated northwards ; the solid and irrefragable ice yielded to glaciers and summer torrents ; vegetation re-appeared and animals ; the reindeer returned and the Eskimo ; milder and milder still grew the climate, till the glaciers and Arctic animals in their turn became things of the past, till the plains

were clothed with grass, and great forests roughened the face of the country. Glacialis Ierné had passed away, and Inis na Veeva appeared upon the liquid surface of the sea, bearing a soil fit for the dent of spade and ploughshare. A new and nobler race of men were now advancing from the south and east. It was not Nemeth and his tribe, or the lady Ceasair, or Partholanus, the ill-starred. Civilization and the means of recording their history they did not bring with them. The annals of the cave do not tally with those of the Four Masters. The Book of Invasions is contradicted by silent witnesses out of the earth. The Leabar Gabailé must be re-written, and the time-honoured traditions of the bards interpreted after a new method. It was no branch of Scythic stock, no Aryan-speaking people, who now swarmed over these countries, but a dark, small, oval-faced race, between whom and the tall, fierce, blue-eyed Celt there was neither kinship nor resemblance.

CHAPTER V.

THE DISPERSION.

THE earth is inhabited by eight distinct races of man—the Australian, the Negrito, the Maorie, the Red Indian, the Eskimo, and the African, the Mongol, the Scythian, and the Turanian. The Australian, with fine dark wavy hair and chocolate-coloured skin; the Negrito, of like complexion, but with woolly hair; the Red Indian, broad-headed, olive-skinned, with black eyes and coarse black hair; the Eskimo (perhaps a variety of the Indian), short-headed and stunted; the Mongol,

round-headed, flat-nosed, slant-eyed, low of stature, broad-faced, with black eyes and straight black hair ; the Scythian, tall, fair-haired, blue-eyed, round-headed ; the Turanian,* well-proportioned, long-headed, brown-skinned, oval-faced, with large dark eyes and soft wavy hair. With these two last lies the future of the world.

Russia was the vast nest of the fair-haired races, the heart from which, as in strong pulsations, were jetted forth those great Celtic and other migrations to desolate the world. It was that frozen north which, throughout early historic periods, and through the darkness that preceded the known birth of letters, poured forth her multitudes under their sea-kings and shepherd-kings, their Vikings and their Hyksos, to submerge for a season all that the thought and toil of nobler nations had produced.

From Southern Asia, perhaps from that classic plain eastward in Eden, the Turanian emerged upon the world, thence he spread eastward till he met the Mongol, and southward till stopped by the Malayan coming up from the isles of the Indian Sea ; westward along the shores of the Mediterranean, over all Egypt and Barbary, over Phoenicia and Greece and Italy, over Spain, France, Belgium, and the British Isles. Here the Turanian stream, pouring from the south, ship-borne perhaps, and curving round to overflow Northern Europe, was met by the Scythian flood

* The reader will remember that the names used in this chapter are employed in a broad physical signification, having no reference to the linguistic distribution of mankind. The needed terminology not having been yet invented, necessitates the employment of a questionable namesystem. There is a very interesting essay by Professor Huxley on this subject.

pouring through Germany into France, and through Scandinavia and the Baltic into the British Isles.

From the Scythian stock shot forth branches — over Europe, the Cymri, the Gael, and the Teuton, the Norseman, and the Slave, with their many families ; and over Asia the terrible name of the Tartar, that ever impending deluge, banked in by the Caspian, the Balkan, and the Steppes, around the Sea of Aral, but ever and anon bursting its barriers, and under some Timour or Ghengiz Khan, flooding all Southern Asia, and obliterating for a season every vestige of civilization.

From the Turanian stock shot forth branches, not barren. In Asia, the Hindoo, the Arabian, and the Zend, the Assyrian, the Phœnician, and the Jew. Further west, the Pelasgian of Greece, the Etruscan of Italy, and in a less pure form the Hellene and the Roman, the Carthaginian, the forgotten Berber, and the Basque.

Of these two mighty divisions of the human race it seems to have been the special task of the latter to found civilizations, and of the former to crush them. They founded the splendid civilizations of Babel, Nineveh, and Babylon, and the Scythians crushed them ; of the Pelasgian Greeks and Italians, and the Scythians crushed them. Slowly and laboriously they built up the splendid and pacific empire of the Romans, in which, as in a field ploughed and watered, the seeds of all that was noble and lovely were quietly germinating towards a new spring. It too was broken into fragments, and trampled beneath the hoofs of a brutish multitude from the north. For a thousand years the silt and slime of that huge deluge overlay

the budding germs of civilization, and the naked horror of sensuality, ignorance, and martial law was laid bare. Good things of day began to droop and drowse, and night's black bird made wing for the leafy woods. To this day the wrecks and fragments of that noble empire are hurled against each other upon a restless and barren ocean of war or preparation of war. The gripe of the Vandal is still in the throat of Europe.

It is one of the colossal misapprehensions of history, and one which owes its origin to the uncandid egotism of our northern writers, that the exhausted populations of the south were refreshed and invigorated by the young warlike blood of the north. The Cimmerian regions, until they were touched by the quickening contact of the south, bred nought but ignorance, slow melancholy, and war. The peoples whom the father of history beheld upon their knees worshipping the naked sword, seem to have been absolutely incapable of raising themselves without assistance out of the primæval welter. The renaissance and modern civilization made their way through the silt and mire of that northern deluge, in spite of Cimmerian influences, and not through their help. Else how comes it that through the length and breadth of that vast Aryan land, from the Isles of Britain to the Great Wall of China and the extremities of Kamschatka, we light nowhere upon any trace of the civilization which, upon the theory of chances, their young warlike blood must at least somewhere have succeeded in establishing, somewhere the birth of a noble piety, somewhere the invention of letters, somewhere the existence of beautiful manners and a true theory of life. We do not ask for any

sublime ruins upon the Baltic comparable to those which fill men's eyes with tears as they travel through Southern Italy and along the shores of the Levant. We ask for no Republican Tartary, with multitudinous free states pouring their light like stars upon the dark turmoil of the mediæval night, with some pile-built Venice on the Sea of Aral, bright Lucifer of the glittering flock ; we crave but some slight proof of some slight indigenous civilization, some echo of a strain sweeter to the ear than the howl of the wolf and the war-cry of the Slave. We look and listen in vain. There is none. Whatever may have been the capacities of the northern peoples and their latent aptitudes, it was with the Mediterranean and Semitic peoples that civilizations have had their origin.

So much may be fairly said, regarding critically the exact results of time, but yet we must remember that civilization, like culture, is by no means so great or all-important as we have been taught to believe. Civilization indeed seems to be nothing else than the art or faculty of directing into beneficent and lasting results those forces of human nature which have been generated by causes with which civilization has nothing in common, primal spontaneous energies of the human soul. The Edda of Snorro, the Niebelungen Lied, and the Irish bardic literature, especially that priceless portion of it which deals with the age of Cuculain and the Ultonian Knights of the Red Branch, would doubtless never have reached us at all, nor would the elements of which they are composed have been moulded into even the rudest epic forms, but for influences stealing into the North of Europe from the civilized South.

And yet we perceive clearly in those literatures indications of an inherent magnanimous spirit, a courage, a tenderness, a constancy and loyalty to the generous and the beautiful, the knowledge of which that they did urge forward and sustain countless multitudes, more satisfies the mind than half the results of civilization.

CHAPTER VI.

BASQUE AND CELT.

THE Irish are a mixed race, the Basque and the Celt went to their formation. The original inhabitants of the country were Basque, but successive Celtic invasions obliterated the ancient Basque language, and altered the physical appearance of the people. In this respect the history of Ireland, and indeed of all North-Western Europe, resembles that of Greece. In the times of which Homer sang, the Greek nobles had yellow hair and blue eyes. At the time when the heroic literature of Ireland was composed, the Irish nobles* had yellow hair and blue eyes. Athene seized Achilles by the yellow locks, while she herself was a blue-eyed goddess. Crimthann, who held in check the rebellious sons of Cathair More for Conn of the Hundred Battles, was surnamed Culboy, because the smelted gold was not yellower than his hair; while the locks of Cuculain, the great Ultonian hero, were yellower than the blossom

* The later bardic literature exhibits a preference for dark hair, with a complexion white and ruddy. Such was Diarmid, the beauty of Ossian's heroes.

cave-dwellers, because Roman arms and implements are discovered in the English caves. That they *sometimes* used them as dwelling-places is all that can be inferred. The perpetual damp, the fewness of natural caves, the difficulty of digging or quarrying artificial ones, and, on the other hand, the abundance of timber and the ease with which booths and timber houses might be constructed by a people so intelligent and advanced, necessitate the conclusion that their houses were made of this material, and that they did not live from choice in earth-holes like vermin.

Among minor characteristics of this race, it may be mentioned that the length of the head was caused by the development of the occiput, the forehead being vertical, that the shin-bone exhibits a peculiar flattened form, termed platycnemic, and which is supposed to have been caused by the habit of walking bare-footed during many generations. Also a peculiar osseous ridge ran along the thigh bone from the hip down to the knee, not found in other races.

Ebuda

PTOLEMY'S MAP.



PART II.

Classical References to Ireland.

CHAPTER I.

PTOLEMY'S MAP.

PTOLEMY ALEXANDRINUS flourished at Alexandria in Egypt, about the year 139 A.D., and was one of the most celebrated men of ancient times. His system of astronomy held its ground down to the time of Copernicus, and is interesting even now as being that adopted by Milton for the cosmical scheme which underlies the "Paradise Lost."

The geography of Ptolemy was founded, as he expressly states, upon the works of his predecessor, Marinus of Tyre, who flourished about 100 A.D., and who was supposed to have derived his information from Phœnician navigators ; but the better opinion is that his knowledge was supplied from Greek sources.

The annexed Map probably represents the Greek conception of Ireland at about the date 50 A.D.—a date in Irish history at which we can know nothing except perhaps a few prominent names of kings and battles.

The kings who gave their names to the nations which first meet us in authentic Irish history were not yet born. In the dawn of Irish history, the nations

whom Ptolemy sets down as inhabiting Ireland had passed away—their tribe-names being merged in those of new and more powerful clans. For example, where Ptolemy sets down the Robogdii we find in early Irish history the Dal Riada or children of Riada,* the *floruit* of whom is in the latter part of the second century A.D. It is remarkable, however, that a very ancient hero named Robog is mentioned by Keatinge as having lived in this part of Ireland from whom Ptolemy's nation may have taken their name. Such conjectures are, however, of little value. Men may amuse themselves by imagining that the Nagnatæ of the west are the Negmacta or Oll-Negmacta, *i.e.* the children of the Mighty Negma—a people renowned in the heroic ages and ruled over by Queen Meave, that the Gangani are the posterity of Gann, scilicet Gann-geni, &c.; but such conjectures are mere trifling.

For the chief promontories we would not expect indigenous names. Merchants would not touch there and would therefore give to them their own nomenclature. The Robogdian is the only exception.

His names of rivers are all probably indigenous. Of these, three may be identified with names which have come down along the line of native tradition. The Bubinda, Græcé *Βουβινδα*, is the Boyne. The Birgus is probably the Barrow, Gælicé Berva, giving its name to the estuary of the three great rivers which drain that portion of Ireland.

The Senus, but for its position, ought to be the Shannon, Gælicé Sen-abhain, the river Sen. The Dur, however, seems to have taken the place of the Sen.

* See Part X., Chap 6.

The Ovoca, celebrated in song, is but a modern application of Ptolemeian nomenclature.

Of sea-port towns, Ptolemy particularly mentions Nagnata in the west as an illustrious city, *ἐπίσημος πόλις*. It was probably Sligo. The placing of the most remarkable city in the north harmonizes with the native historical monuments in which we see clearly this much at least, that the north of Ireland exercised about this time a great military and probably commercial predominance—Ulster being the home and patrimony of the Red Branch Knights, and in them the hegemony of the age. Observe, too, that of inland towns he puts Regia or the Royal city in the midst of Ulster—this royal city being certainly Emain Macha or Armagh, the centre of the great northern confederacy. Tara, be it remembered, had not yet risen into fame and power.

Eblana, modern poetic for Dublin, is also like the Ovoca, derived from Ptolemy, and is not of native descent. Observe that he sets the second Royal city in the South, probably the Limerick of modern times, so that at least three cities take precedence of Eblana or Dublin, viz., Regia, now Armagh; Nagnata, now Sligo; and Regia altera, or Limerick. This harmonizes with the Irish historical monuments in which Dublin does not appear until a late date.*

The attenuated form of the island arises from an error as to the nature of degrees of longitudes, an error which pervades the whole of Ptolemy's geographical work.

* Dublin first appears in the reign of Conn of the Hundred Fights, second century A.D.

CHAPTER II.

MYTH AND FANCY.

THE distant in place and the distant in time have ever been the chosen realms of the imagination. The same procession of thought which marks the historical monuments of each nation is apparent also in men's treatment of strange countries. Concerning unknown or slightly known lands, the imagination is ever ready to project fancies and myths. In mediæval geographical works we are startled at the pictures of the extraordinary beasts and men represented as inhabiting the unvisited portions of the earth. In the time of Milton the diffusion of knowledge precluded imagination from its former domain, and the poet had to pass beyond the stars in order to find a sphere in which fancy might roam at will, and a heaven and a hell be created.

In the age of Homer such a realm for the play of imagination was found in the distant places of the Western world. Beyond the ocean-stream, Homer in fancy beheld the ghosts of his heroes, the realm of the dead. In this stream, too, he placed the land of the Phæacians, with their magic ships, which needed neither oar nor sail, but skimmed the waves obedient to the wish of the mariner ; of the Læstrygonians, who knew not sickness, pain, or thirst. Here, too, was that Ogygian isle, the home of the goddess Kalypso, upon which was cast ashore, ship-wrecked and alone, the much-enduring hero of the Odyssey.

The Greeks certainly identified the Ogygia of Homer

with this country, for Plutarch mentions it as lying on the west of Britain. That Homer did mean Ireland is rendered probable by the prevailing tone of mingled awe and interest with which the more ancient classical writers refer to this dimly known island.

That Ireland should have been known in some vague way to Homer does not seem so improbable when we find Orpheus of Crotona, who flourished in the age of Pisistratus, 540 B.C., and therefore not long, if at all, after Homer, alluding to Ireland, in his *Argonautica*, as having been visited by Jason returning home from the quest of the Golden Fleece, the ancients imagining that there was communication by water between the Baltic and the Euxine. Orpheus calls the island Iernis, but Ierné is the more common classical form of the word. Adrianos Julius also refers to the same classical belief when he writes of Ierné as "an island well known to the sailors of Jason's ship."*

An additional reason for identifying Ogygia with Ireland is supplied by the meaning of the name. Ogyges was a very ancient King of Thebes, hence Ogygia comes to have the meaning of ancient with necessarily the ideas of sacredness and venerableness superadded. Thus it is equivalent to *Insula Sacra*, which we shall presently see was, amongst Mediterranean peoples, the ancient name of the island.

This, then, was that Ogygian isle in which the shipwrecked and solitary Ulysses passed his days weeping beside the shore of the grey sea, and his nights with the fair enchantress in her magic cave. Homer, however, plainly knew little about Ogygia. His

* "*Insula Jasonis puppis bene cognita nautis.*" For the foregoing references, see Ware and Camden.

description of the surrounding scene we may regard as purely work of the imagination, though *Inis na Veeva** boasts still some "groves of living green," though here "poplars and alder trees" yet "quiver," sometimes "the cypress nods," and the "loquacious crow" is still in good voice, but "the depending vines" with their "purple clusters" have disappeared, the "cedar," too, and the "frankincense."† Homer's celebration of the flowing fountains and the plains of vivid green, may possibly have been derived from the reports of navigators, abundance of streams and greenness of plains being the distinguishing physical features‡ of the island, but more probably owes its origin to pure fancy, the imagination of the poet having been touched by the vague reports of navigators concerning this far away island.

In such an age, amongst an imaginative and at the same time ill-informed people, who knew little of Ireland save that it was *Ogygia* and *Insula Sacra*, the most beautiful and pleasing conceptions and pictures would naturally suggest themselves. *Hecatæus*, who lived circa B.C. 400, but who probably only set down in words a conception formed by others, has left an ideal description of Ireland as she appeared to the early Greeks. To *Diodorus Siculus*,§ living in the

* The isle of woods.

† *Odyssey*, Book 6.

‡ Sailors from the torrid south would most readily be struck by and more willingly report these facts. An Irish poet of the Elizabethan age, while residing in France, thus describes his native land. The translation is Sir Samuel Ferguson's:—

"There's a dew at high noon-tide there,
And springs in the yellow sand,
On the fair hills of holy Ireland."

§ B.C. 44.

midst of an age having more exact information as regards Ireland, and who were therefore sceptical and contemptuous to the poetic fancies and reveries of his predecessors, we are indebted for the preservation of the picture drawn by Hecatæus :—

“ Amongst those who have written old stories much like fables, Hecatæus and some others say that there is an island in the ocean over against Gaul as big as Sicily, under the Arctic Pole, where the Hyperboreans inhabit, so called because they lie beyond the blasts of the north wind ; that the soil here is very rich and fruitful and the climate temperate, insomuch that there are two crops in the year. They say that Latona was born here, and, therefore, they worship Apollo before all the other gods, and because they are daily singing songs in praise of this god, and ascribing to him the highest honours, they say that the inhabitants demean themselves like Apollo's priests, who has here a stately grove and renowned temple, of round form, beautified with many gifts. That there is a city likewise consecrated to this god, whose citizens are most of them harpers, who, playing on the harp, chant sacred hymns to Apollo in the temples, setting forth his glorious acts. The Hyperboreans use their natural language, but of long and ancient time have had a special kindness for the Greeks, and more especially for the Athenians and them of Delos, and they say that some of the Grecians passed over to the Hyperboreans, and left them divers presents inscribed with Greek characters ; and that Abaris formerly travelled thence to Greece, and renewed the ancient league of friendship with the Delians.”

This Abaris was a mythical personage, famed for wizardry and enchantments, who in remote times was said to have visited Sicily and Greece. The Greeks first imagined such a beautiful land beyond the blasts of the North wind, peopled by Apollo's priests and often honoured by his presence, and then naturally brought themselves into connection with it by supposing ancient

Greeks to have gone thither and Abaris to have come from thence.*

The accumulated evidence pointing to the sacred and venerable character with which the ancients invested Ireland, along with the internal evidence contained in the foregoing quotation, sufficiently identifies this country with the mysterious island of Hecataeus.

Diodorus Siculus himself calls the Irish, cannibals. A pretty quick descent for the priests of Apollo.

The fact was that about this time classical writers began to express an inordinate contempt and aversion for all peoples outside the bounds of conventional civilization, thus curiously reversing the intellectual tendency of more ancient times.

The Britons as well as the Irish were made the subject of various slanders of this kind, which, from the authoritative, positive, and negative testimony of Cæsar and Tacitus, we know to be untrue. This intellectual vice is always engendered under an Imperialism.

CHAPTER III.

HISTORIC REFERENCES TO IRELAND BY CLASSICAL WRITERS.

THAT Ireland was traditionally known in the Mediterranean as *Insula Sacra*, we learn from the following interesting passage in the writings of Festus Rufus Avienus, who flourished in the early days of the Empire, and who wrote a metrical geography of the world:—

* The idea of the round temple must I think be referred to the raths and druidic stone circles, which, to the uncivilized Europe of this age, supplied the purpose of temples.

"Now* from this point, namely, from the islands of the *Æstrumnides*, a ship's course occupies two days before you reach the Sacred Island, as our ancestors called it. This isle, amid the waves, produces abundant herbage, and it, far and wide, the Irish—*Hiberni*—inhabit.

"Close beside it again lies the island of the Britons (*Albiones*). To the countries adjoining the *Astrumnides* the inhabitants of Tarshish were accustomed to make voyages; and even Carthaginian colonists used to settle in them. Moreover, an immense number of persons having sailed between the Pillars of Hercules, used to visit these waters, of which Himilco,† the Phœnician, after a voyage of nearly four months and with his own personal testimony, declares that they are quite navigable. These waters, I say, Himilco the Carthaginian having passed the Ocean-stream, announced that he had both seen and assayed. This information now produced after a long time from the depths of the Phœnician annals I have published for thy pleasure."

From the foregoing we learn not only that Ireland was the *Insula Sacra* of the ancients, but that from very early times there had been communication not only between Spain and Ireland, but also between Ireland and the Carthaginians, if not Phœnicians.

* *At hinc (ex Æstrumnidis) duobus in Sacram, sic, Insulam
Dixere Prisci solibus cursus, rati est,
Hæc inter undas multum cespitem jacit,
Eamque late gens Hibernorum colit;
Propinqua rursus Insula Albionum patet,
Tartæsiisque in terminos Æstrumnidum,
Enavigandi mos erat, Carthaginiæ.
Etiam colonis, et vulgus inter Herculis
Agitans columnas hæc adibant æquora,
Quæ Himilco Pœnus mensibus vix quatuor
Ut ipse semet rem probasse retulit
Enavigantem posse transmitti asserit.
Hæc olim Himilco Pœnus Oceano super
Spectasse semet et probasse retulit,
Hæc nos ab imis Phœnicum annalibus
Prolata longo tempore edidimus tibi.*

† He flourished while Carthage was yet a great state, therefore probably before the second Punic War.

The Milesian legend which derives the Irish from Spain, if it does not represent a real Spanish conquest of the island, was certainly formulated under the influence of that communication with the Peninsula to which Avienus refers.

Cæsar, treating of the Britons, remarks as the most conspicuous military trait of that nation, their employment of war-chariots, the custom being general amongst them, though not wholly obsolete in Gaul. From his allusion to the similarity of the manners of the Irish and the Britons, we would naturally expect to find the use of the war-chariot in Ireland also. Now, the Irish bardic literature which concerns this age, *i.e.*, the time surrounding the birth of Christ, alone amongst our bardic cycles, treats of war-chariots. Meave, Queen of Connaught; Fergus MacRoy her Captain; Fardia, the great western champion; Con-cobar, King of Ulster; and Cuculain, the hero of the age, are chariot-fighting personages. And the crisis and culmination of Cuculain's ascent in his martial career reveals him in his magic war-car laying waste the battalions of his foes, which shows that chariot-fighting was in that age almost synonymous with war, or at all events, with its highest form. Even the scythes referred to by Pomponius Mela are noticed in the description of Cuculain's chariot.*

The bardic literature dealing with all the succeeding centuries makes no allusions to this description of warfare.

This use of the war-car was common at one time

* See MS. translation of the *Tain-bo-Cuallgne*, B.I.A.

over all Europe, and indicates a state of society in which agriculture was not known or was not general—a time in which the plains were not enclosed with fences and ditches into fields; but when cattle formed the wealth of the people. In such a state of society, war-cars which need an open and unobstructed country for their evolution, are common. With the growth of agriculture they fall into disuse. Thus, Cæsar observes that the Britons knew not gardening or agriculture, but lived on the flesh and milk of their herds.

The following description, which is Cæsar's, of the Britons may be read, *mutatis mutandis*, as of the Irish of the first century, B.C. : "Most of them use chariots in battle. They first scour up and down on every side, throwing their darts, creating disorder in the ranks by the terror of their horses and noise of their chariot-wheels, and when they are got among troops of horse, leap out and fight like infantry. Meantime, the charioteers retire to a safe distance from the field, and place themselves in such a manner that if the others are overpowered by the number of the enemy, they may secure their retreat.

Thus they act with the agility of cavalry and the steadiness of infantry in battle, and become so expert by constant practice, that in declivities and precipices, they can stop their horses in full speed and on a sudden, check and turn them, run along the pole, stand on the yoke, and then as quickly dart into their chariots again. They frequently retreat on purpose, and after they have drawn our men a little away, leap from their poles and wage an unequal war on foot. Their manner of fighting on horseback creates the same danger both to the retreater and the pursuer. Add

to this, they never fight in bodies, but scattered and at great distances, and had parties in reserve supporting one another and fresh troops ready to relieve the weary."*

That the use of the war-chariot ceased in Ireland at about the time of the birth of Christ may be shown with some certainty, as thus :—Tacitus writing in the first century A.D., says, that Ireland was more frequented by merchants† than Britain, and of Britain that only some of the nations still employed the war-chariot. Ireland, therefore, would to a still greater extent than Britain, have given up this method of warfare, which, as we see, must have been concurrent with a backward civilization and plains of the nature of prairies.

Add to this the negative testimony of the Irish bardic literature which does not mention war-cars in this or the succeeding centuries. Its positive testimony with regard to the former century being substantiated, its negative testimony as regards the century ensuing should also be accepted, supported as it is by the argument I have used drawn from Tacitus.

We may conclude then that from the first century forward Ireland began to be agricultural or a corn exporting country. Her other exports, doubtless, were hides, butter, timber, and I would add woollen fabrics—the latter being in early historic and mediæval ages a staple Irish export. I conclude woollen fabrics from the following considerations. In the heroic age,

* I have made use of this description in my epic narration of the achievements of Cuoulain, in aid of the bardic literature which is not so specific in its descriptions of chariot fighting.

† *Portus magis cogniti per commercia et concursus mercatorum.*

the idea of the stained bratta or mantle, crimson, blue or green, plays a part as vital and intimate in the cyclic literature as the war-chariot. Had Cuculain's raiment been of skins, the fact would have come down in the literature as indissolubly associated with him and his peers as is the war-car. That the bards did not despise a raiment of skins is shown by the fact that Cuculain's own charioteer Læg is represented as wearing "a light, graceful frock of deer skin." I think it probable that the Britons who, according to Cæsar, wore skins, did so more for ornament than necessity. At all events, the Irish being, on the testimony of Tacitus, a stage beyond the Britons in the first century A.D., there is no objection to our accepting the indirect testimony of the bardic literature as to the manufacture of woollen fabrics in the preceding century.

Cæsar remarks, too, on the long hair of the Britons. This was also true of the Irish heroes whose hair rolls over their shoulders, their faces at the same time being shaved bare. The Britons, however, wore hair on the upper lip. It is strange that long hair should mark martial races. The heroes of Homer, the Spartans of history, and the champions of the Irish bards were all long-haired warriors.

Having before us Cæsar's assertion that the British warriors stained themselves that they might inspire the more fear, we might detect some dim references to a similar practice in Ireland, but anything definite of this nature seems to have faded from the literature.

Community of wives ascribed by Cæsar to the Britons is quite repugnant to the heroic literature of Ireland which breathes more the antique German

spirit of heroic chastity. Thus Cuculain in his boyhood is so distressed and shame-stricken at the sight of female nakedness that he is taken captive in his confusion. Deirdré, the Helen of the heroic age, perishes from shame and grief when a coarse and ribald jest is addressed to her. Lewy, son of Ith, one of the Milesian conquerors, came suddenly upon his wife as he emerged from the sea after bathing. She died of shame. Tuhul Tectmar, whom I have set down as the first historical monarch, had a daughter who similarly perished of shame and grief on learning that she was the wife of a king who had before married her sister, but whom he kept in durance and gave out that she was dead. But it is the teaching of history that amongst simple and heroic peoples this virtue is held in high honour.

While Tacitus was with his father-in-law, Agricola, in Britain, a sub-king of Ireland, a "regulus," as he is described by Tacitus, having been expelled out of the island, fled to Agricola and implored his assistance to enforce his reinstatement, alleging, as might be expected, that an easy conquest of the island might be made by the Romans. Tacitus here relates an opinion expressed by Agricola, that the conquest of Ireland would be desirable in the interest of the Roman occupation of Britain, in order that from the eyes of rebellious Britons the disturbing prospect of a free neighbouring nation might be removed; also that a single Roman legion, with a few auxiliaries, would be sufficient for the conquest. Tacitus forgets to add the advantages of Roman gold, which, we may be certain, Agricola did not ignore. Ireland, with its many reguli and contending tribes, could not have at this time

combined against a foreign power, and from the moment of the landing of the Romans, warriors second to none in that age would have flocked for pay to his standard, and defeated or oppressed tribes would have everywhere risen to welcome him as their deliverer.

That the subjugation of the island even then was rather more difficult than in the opinion of Agricola it seemed to be, is shown by the fact that in spite of the Imperial advantages involved in the accomplishment, it was never attempted. The free neighbouring nation of the Hiberni preserved their freedom, and eventually materially contributed to the expulsion of Rome and her legions out of Britain.

Tacitus remarks of the Britons that they consulted the gods by entrails. There is one example of this in the Irish literature. In the ancient tale named the Breen Da Derga,* a pig is slain, and his entrails inspected by the soothsayer.

Their habit of entrusting authority to women, remarked on by Roman writers, is paralleled in our heroic literature. Macha, Queen of Ireland, Meave, Queen of Connaught, and Brigamba, a judge and law-giver of Ulster, are examples of Irish *Cartismanduas* and *Boadiceas*, appearing in the heroic age of Irish history.

For a period of more than three centuries after the time of Tacitus the Romans were in full possession of Britain, and doubtless exercised a considerable moral and social, if not political influence in Ireland. The

* O'Curry's M. & C., vol. 3.

extent of that influence I purpose to consider at some length later on, under and subsequent to the reign of Cormac Mac Art,* King of Ireland, in the third century A.D., employing to a limited extent the bardic history of literature relating to that period. So scanty are even Roman authorities for the events of the next two centuries that Gibbon is obliged to draw his authorities chiefly from the verses of the poet Claudian.

Although the Romans never conquered or even invaded Ireland, there is classical evidence for what, after all, is exceedingly probable, viz., that their influence in Ireland was considerable. In the reign of Constantine, A.D. 306, a contemporary poet congratulates him on the fact that the Irish kings were subject to his sway. This must be interpreted in the sense of yielding homage and respect to the Emperor or to his representative in Britain. I believe that during those centuries which saw the Romans in the north-west of Europe, Ireland enjoyed her full share of such civilizing influences as accompanied their progress, so far as a nation not directly subject to their control could be affected.

Besides social progress, an immense advance in political unity marks the history of the Irish during those ages, as reflected in the bardic literature, and, accordingly, one is prepared for the statement of Claudian, that during the floruit of Stilicho and towards the close of the fourth century an Irish king† was able to stir up the whole of Ireland against the Romans, and, as we also know, the Dal-Riadic Irish and the Picts of North Britain.

* Parts x., xii., xiii.

† Niall the Great of the Nine Hostages, Rex Hiberniæ, circa 400 A.D.

"Me, too, she (Britannia) says, Stilicho fortified, what time the Irish king stirred up the whole of Ireland, and the sea foamed with his hostile fleets."*

The authority of Claudian, which, by the way, Gibbon always accepts without question, I believe I can support with other verifiable evidence drawn from classical sources, showing the large political and military combinations which might be and were formed by the Irish kings of those ages.

I can also, I think, prove not only that Christianity was introduced into Ireland long before the time of St. Patrick, but had extended widely over the island before his arrival, which, if admitted, prepares us for the statement that Celestius the Pelagian wrote letters to his parents in Ireland; and that Irish Christian theology was even then, in the fourth century, beginning to attract that attention which it secured in the sixth and seventh centuries.†

The light shed upon this very interesting epoch of Irish history, *i.e.*, from the first to the fifth century, from classical sources, will, however, be best understood by the reader after a study of the evidence supplied by native monuments.

The classical names of Ireland are even more numerous than those in use amongst the Irish bards, many

* "Me quoque inquit
Munivit Stilichon totam cum Scotus Iernen
Movit et infesto spumavit remige Tethys."

† St. Jerome denounces him as a man over loaded with Irish nonsense—*Scoticis pulibus prægravatus*. The doctrines of Celestius are exactly those we would expect to find arise in Ireland where men could not ignore, in the face of the bardic literature, the inherent nobleness of humanity. Celestius was an Irishman.—*Robertson*, vol. 2, p. 142. —See *post*, Part xiii, chap. 3.

as are these last. They are Ogygia, Insula Sacra, Iris, Ierné, Ierna, Iouernia,* Overnia, Juverna, Bernia, Hibernia, Hiberio, Hiberioné,† Scotia. The last name was applied to it by the Romans, and was common during the Scholastic ages. The root of the remaining names seems to be the letters I and R, and probably represents the Eiré and Erinn of the native Irish. The B in some of the forms doubtless arose from the love of euphony. The Romans, however, deemed that Hibernia was so called on account of its wintry climate. Thus Claudian goes so far as to call us "ice-bound :"—

"Scotorum cumulos flevit glacialis Ierné."

"Ice-bound Ireland mourned over the slaughtered heaps of her Irish."

* Ptolemy.

† St. Patrick, Epistle to Coroticus.

PART III.

Introduction of the Bardic History of Ireland.

CHAPTER I.

DAWN.

THERE is not perhaps in existence a product of the human mind so extraordinary as the Irish annals. From a time dating for more than three thousand years before the birth of Christ, the stream of Hibernian history flows down uninterrupted, copious and abounding, between accurately defined banks, with here and there picturesque meanderings, here and there flowers lolling on those delusive waters, but never concealed in mists or lost in a marsh. As the centuries wend their way, king succeeds king with a regularity most gratifying, and fights no battle, marries no wife, begets no children, does no doughty deed of which a contemporaneous note was not taken, and which has not been incorporated in the annals of his country. To think that this mighty fabric of recorded events, so stupendous in its dimensions, so clean and accurate in its details, so symmetrical and elegant, should be after all a mirage and delusion, a gorgeous bubble, whose glowing rotundity, whose rich hues, azure, purple, amethyst and gold, vanish at a touch and are gone, leaving a sorry remnant over which the patriot disillusionized may grieve.

✓ Early Irish history is the creation mainly of the bards. Romances and poems supplied the great blocks with which the fabric was reared. These the chroniclers fitted into their places, into the interstices pouring shot-rubbish, and grouting. The bardic intellect, revolving round certain ideas for centuries, and round certain material facts, namely, the mighty barrows of their ancestors, produced gradually a vast body of definite historic lore, life-like kings and heroes, real-seeming queens. The mechanical intellect followed with perspicuous arrangement, with a thirst for accuracy, minuteness, and verisimilitude. With such quarrymen and such builders the work went on apace, and anon a fabric huge rose like an exhalation, and like an exhalation its towers and pinnacles of empurpled mist are blown asunder and dislimn.

✓ Doubtless the legendary blends at some point with the historic narrative. The cloud and mist somewhere condense into the clear stream of indubitable fact. But how to discern under the rich and teeming mythus of the bards, the course of that slender and doubtful rivulet, or beneath the piled rubbish and dust of the chroniclers, discover the tiny track which elsewhere broadens into the highway of a nation's history. In this minute, circumstantial, and most imposing body of history, where the certain legend exhibits the form of plain and probable narrative, and the certain fact displays itself with a mythical flourish, how there to fix upon any one point and say here is the first truth. It is a task perilous and perplexing.

Des Cartes commenced his investigations into the nature of the soul by assuming the certainty of his own existence. Standing upon this adamant foot-

hold, he sought around him for ground equally firm, which should support his first step in the quagmire of metaphysics. But in the early Irish history, what one solid and irrefutable fact appears upon which we can put foot or hand and say, "This, at all events, is certain; this, that I hold is not mist; this that I stand on is neither water nor mire"? Running down the long list of Milesian kings, chiefs, brehons, and bards, where first shalt we pause, arrested by some substantial form in this procession of empty ghosts—how distinguish the man from the shadow, when over all is diffused the same concealing mist, and the eyes of the living and the dead look with the same pale glare? Eocha of the heavy sighs, how shall we certify or how deny the existence of that melancholy man, or of Tiernmas, who introduced the worship of fire? Lara of the ships, did he really cross the sea to Gaul, and return thence to give her name to Leinster, and beget Leinster kings? Ugaine More, did he rule to the Torrian sea, holding sea-coast towns in fee, or was he a pre-historic shadow thrown into the past from the stalwart figure of Niall of the Hostages? Was Morann a real Brehon, or fabulous as the collar that threatened to strangle him in the utterances of unjust judgments? Was Ferkeirtney a poet, having flesh and bones and blood, and did Bricrind,* the satirist, really compose those bitter ranns for the Ultonians? or were both as ghostly as the prime druid, Amergin, who came into the island with the sons of Milesius,† and in a manner beyond all praise, collected the histories of the con-

* Floruit, circa A.D. 1.

† See part vii., chap. 4.

quered peoples ? Or do we wrong that venerable man whose high-sounding name clung for ages around the estuary of the Obōka.

One thing at all events we cannot deny—that the national record is at least lively. Clear noble shapes of kings and queens, chieftains, brehons, and bards gleam in the large rich light shed abroad over the triumphant progress of the legendary tale. We see Dûns snow-white with roofs striped crimson and blue, chariots cushioned with noble skins, with bright bronze wheels and silver poles and yokes. The lively-hearted, resolute steeds gallop past, bearing the warrior and his charioteer with the loud clangour of rattling spears and darts. As in some bright young dawn, over the dewy grass, and in the light of the rising sun, superhuman in size and beauty, their long, yellow hair curling on their shoulders, bound around the temples with torcs of gold, clad in white linen tunics, and loose brattas of crimson silk fastened on the breast with huge wheel brooches of gold, their long spears musical with running rings ; with naked knees and bare crown, they cluster round their kings, the chieftains and knights of the heroic age of Ireland.*

The dawn of history is like the dawn of the day. The night of the pre-historic epoch grows rare, its dense weight is relaxed ; flakes of fleeting and uncertain light wander and vanish ; vague shapes of floating mist reveal themselves, gradually assuming form and colour ; faint hues of crimson, silver, and gold strike

* Down to the Danish epoch the National garb consisted in a tunic reaching to the knee, a mantle fastened by a large brooch, feet bare or sandalled.

here and there, and the legendary dawn grows on. But the glory of morn though splendid is unsubstantial; the glory of changing and empurpled mist—vapours that conceal the solid face of nature, the hills, trees, streams, and the horizon, holding between us and the landscape a concealing veil, through whose close woof the eye cannot penetrate, and over all a weird strange light.

In the dawn of the history of all nations we see this deceptive light, those glorious and unearthly shapes; before Grecian history, the gods and demigods who fought around Ilium; before Roman, the strong legends of Virginius and Brutus: in the dawn of Irish history, the Knights of the Red Branch, and all the glory that surrounded the Court of Concobar Mac Nessa, High King of the Ultonians.

But of what use these concealing glories, these cloudy warriors, and air-built palaces? Why not pass on at once to credible history?

A nation's history is made for it by circumstances, and the irresistible progress of events; but their legends, they make for themselves. In that dim twilight region, where day meets night, the intellect of man, tired by contact with the vulgarity of actual things, goes back for rest and recuperation, and there sleeping, projects its dreams against the waning night and before the rising of the sun.

The legends represent the imagination of the country; they are that kind of history which a nation desires to possess. They betray the ambition and ideals of the people, and, in this respect, have a value far beyond the tale of actual events and duly recorded deeds, which are no more history than a skeleton is a man.

Nay, too, they have their own reality. They fill the mind with an adequate and satisfying pleasure. They present a rhythmic completeness and a beauty not to be found in the fragmentary and ragged succession of events in time. Achilles and Troy appear somehow more real than Histæus and Miletus, Cuculain and Emain Macha than Brian Borōm and Kincoráh.

Such is the effect produced by a sympathetic and imaginative study of the bardic literature, the critical faculty being for a time held in abeyance, but with its inevitable reappearance and reassertion of its rights, that gorgeous world, with all its flashing glories, dissolves like a dream, or is held together only by a resolute suppression of all disturbing elements. If we endeavour to realize, vividly and as a whole, the early ages and personages of Irish history, piercing below the annals, studying them in connection with the imaginative literature, using everywhere a strict and critical eye, and demanding that verisimilitude and underlying harmony which we look for in modern historical romance, imagination itself wavers and fails. Here is a splendid picture, complete in all its parts, fully satisfying the imagination ; but yonder is another, and the two will not harmonize ; or here is a fact stated, and the picture contradicts the fact. So contemplated, the historic track, clear and definite in the annals, viewed through the medium of the bardic literature, is doubtful and elusive in the extreme. Spite its splendid appearance in the annals, it is thin, legendary, evasive. Looked at with the severe eyes of criticism, the broad walled highway of the old historians, on which pass many noble figures of kings and queens, brehons, bards, kerds and warriors, legislators and druids, real-

seeming antique shapes of men and women, marked by many a carn, piled above heroes, illustrious with battles, elections, conventions, melts away into thin air. The glare of bardic light flees away ; the broad, firm highway is torn asunder and dispersed ; even the narrow, doubtful track is not seen ; we seem to foot it hesitatingly, anxiously, from stepping-stone to stepping-stone set at long distances in some quaking Cimmerian waste. But all around, in surging, tumultuous motion, come and go the gorgeous, unearthly beings that long ago emanated from bardic minds, a most weird and mocking world. Faces rush out of the darkness, and as swiftly retreat again. Heroes expand into giants, and dwindle into goblins, or fling aside the heroic form and gambol as buffoons ; gorgeous palaces are blown asunder like a smoke-wreath ; kings, with wand of silver and ard-rōth of gold, move with all their state from century to century ; puissant heroes, whose fame reverberates through and sheds a glory over epochs, approach and coalesce ; battles are shifted from place to place and century to century ; buried monarchs re-appear, and run a new career of glory. The explorer visits an enchanted land where he is mocked and deluded. Everything seems blown loose from its fastenings. All that should be most stable is whirled round and borne away like foam or dead leaves in a storm.

But with the cessation of this creative bardic energy, what a deposit and residuum for the annalists. Consider the great work of the Four Masters, as it treats of this period, that strange sarcophagus filled with the imagined dust of visionary hosts. There lies a vast silent land, a land of the dead, a vast continent of the

dead, lit with pale phosphoric radiance. The weird light that surges round us elsewhere has passed away from that land. The phantasmal energy has ceased there—the transmutation scenes that mock, the chaos, and the whirlwind. There, too, at one time, the same phantasmagoria prevailed, real seeming warriors thundered, kings glittered, kerds wrought, harpers harped, chariots rolled. But all that has passed away. Reverent hands, to whom that phantasmal world was real, decently composed and laid aside in due order the relics and anatomies of those airy nations, building over each hero his tomb, and setting up his grave-stone, piously gravating the year of his death and birth, and his battles. There they repose in their multitudes in ordered and exact numbers and relation, reaching away into the dim past to the edge of the great deluge, and beyond it; there the Queen Ceasair and her comrades, pre-Noachian wanderers; there Fintann,* who lived on both sides of the great flood, and roamed the depths when the world was submerged; there Partholanus and his ill-starred race—the chroniclers know them all; there the children of Nemed in their own Golgotha, their stones all carefully lettered, these not so ancient as the rest, only three thousand years before the birth of Christ; there the Clan Fomor, a giant race, and the Firbolgs with their correlatives, Fir-Domnan and Fir-Gailean—the Tuatha De Danān, whom the prudent annalist condemns to a place amongst the dead—a divine race they will not die—they flee afar, preferring their phantasmal life; even the advent of the Talkend† will not slay them, though

* See *post*, chapter on Ceasairian cycle of divinities.

† St. Patrick, on account of his tonsured crown, Tail = razor, ceann = head.

their glory suffers eclipse before the new faith. The children of Milith* are there with their long ancestry reaching to Egypt and Holy Land—Heber, Heremon, Amergin, Ir,† with all their descendants, each beneath his lettered stone; Tiernmas and Moh Corb, Ollav Fohla, their lines descending through many centuries; all put away and decently composed for ever. No confusion now, no dissolving scenes or aught that shocks and disturbs, no conflicting events and incredible re-appearances. Chronology is respected. The critical and historical intellect has provided that all things shall be done rightly and in order, that the obits and births and battles should be natural and imposing, and worthy of the annals of an ancient people.

And thus, regarding the whole from a point of view sufficiently remote, a certain epic completeness and harmony characterizes that vast panoramic succession of ages and races.

CHAPTER II.

RATH AND CAIRN GERMS OF THE HISTORY.

SCATTERED over the surface of every country in Europe may be found sepulchral monuments, the remains of pre-historic times and nations, and of a phase of life and civilization which has long since passed away. No country in Europe is without its cromlechs and

* Milesius, King of Spain.

† All sons of Milesius.

dolmens, huge earthen tumuli, great flagged sepulchres, and enclosures of tall pillar-stones. The men by whom these works were made, so interesting in themselves, and so different from anything of the kind erected since, were not strangers and aliens, but our own ancestors, and out of their rude civilization our own has slowly grown. Of that elder phase of European civilization no record or tradition has been anywhere bequeathed to us. Of its nature, and the ideas and sentiments whereby it was sustained, nought may now be learned save by an examination of those tombs themselves, and of the dumb remnants, from time to time exhumed out of their soil—rude instruments of clay, flint, brass, and gold, and by speculations and reasonings founded upon these, archæological gleanings, meagre and sapless.

For after the explorer has broken up, certainly desecrated, and perhaps destroyed those noble sepulchral raths; after he has disinterred the bones laid there once by pious hands, and the urn with its unrecognisable ashes of king or warrior, and by the industrious labour of years hoarded his fruitless treasure of stone celt and arrow-head, of brazen sword and gold fibula and torque; and after the savant has rammed many skulls with sawdust, measuring their capacity, and has adorned them with some obscure label, and has tabulated and arranged the implements and decorations of flint and metal in the glazed cases of the cold gaunt museum, the imagination, unsatisfied and revolted, shrinks back from all that he has done. Still we continue to inquire, receiving from him no adequate response—who were those ancient chieftains and warriors for whom an affectionate people raised those

strange tombs? What life did they lead? What deeds perform? How did their personality affect the minds of their people and posterity? How did our ancestors look upon those great tombs, certainly not reared to be forgotten, and how did they—those huge monumental pebbles and swelling raths—enter into and affect the civilization or religion of the times?

We see the cromlech with its massive slab and immense supporting pillars, but we vainly endeavour to imagine for whom it was first erected, and how that greater than cyclopean house affected the minds of those who made it, or those who were reared in its neighbourhood or within reach of its influence. We see the stone cist with its great smooth flags, the rocky cairn, and huge barrow and massive walled cathair, but the interest which they invariably excite is only aroused to subside again unsatisfied. From this department of European antiquities the historian retires baffled, and the dry savant is alone master of the field, but a field which, as cultivated by him alone, remains barren, or fertile only in things the reverse of exhilarating. An antiquarian museum is more melancholy than a tomb. ✓

But there is one country in Europe, in which, by virtue of a marvellous strength and tenacity of the historical intellect, and of filial devotedness to the memory of their ancestors, there have been preserved down into the early phases of mediæval civilization, and then committed to the sure guardianship of manuscript, the hymns, ballads, stories, and chronicles, the names, pedigrees, achievements, and even characters, of those ancient kings and warriors over whom those massive cromlechs were erected and great cairns ✓

piled. There is not a conspicuous sepulchral monument in Ireland, the traditional history of which is not recorded in our ancient literature, and of the heroes in whose honour they were raised. In the rest of Europe there is not a single barrow, dolmen, or cist of which the ancient traditional history is recorded; in Ireland there is hardly one of which it is not. And these histories are in many cases as rich and circumstantial as that of men of the greatest eminence who have lived in modern times. Granted that the imagination which for centuries followed with eager interest the lives of these heroes, beheld as gigantic what was not so, as romantic and heroic what was neither one nor the other, still the great fact remains, that it was beside and in connection with the mounds and cairns that this history was elaborated, and elaborated concerning them and concerning the heroes to whom they were sacred.

On the plain of Tara, beside the little stream Nemna,* itself famous as that which first turned a mill-wheel in Ireland, there lies a barrow, not itself very conspicuous in the midst of others, all named and illustrious in the ancient literature of the country. The ancient hero there interred is to the student of the Irish bardic literature a figure as familiar and clearly seen as any personage in the *Biographia Britannica*. We know the name he bore as a boy and the name he bore as a man. We know the names of his father and his grandfather, and of the father of his grandfather; of his mother, and the father and mother of his mother,

* In the reign of Cormac Mac Art, circa A.D. 240. See Part x., chap. 8. Before this time the quern was in use.

and the pedigrees and histories of each of these. We know the name of his nurse, and of his children, and of his wife, and the character of his wife, and of the father and mother of his wife, and where they lived and were buried. We know all the striking events of his boyhood and manhood, the names of his horses and his weapons, his own character and his friends, male and female. We know his battles, and the names of those whom he slew in battle, and how he was himself slain, and by whose hands. We know his physical and spiritual characteristics, the device upon his shield, and how that was originated, carved, and painted, and by whom. We know the colour of his hair, the date of his birth and of his death, and his relations, in time and otherwise, with the remainder of the princes and warriors with whom, in that mound-raising period of our history, he was connected, in hostility or friendship; and all this enshrined in ancient song, the transmitted traditions of the people who raised that barrow, and who laid within it sorrowing their brave ruler and defender. That mound is the tomb of Cuculain, once king of the district in which Dundalk stands to-day, and the ruins of whose earthen fortification may still be seen two miles from that town.*

This is a single instance, and used merely as an example, but one out of a multitude almost as striking. There is not a king of Ireland, described as such in the ancient annals, whose barrow is not mentioned in these or other compositions, and every one of which

* The career and character of this great hero, and of his contemporaries, are described fully in the imaginative series.

may at the present day be identified where the ignorant plebeian or the ignorant patrician has not destroyed them. The early history of Ireland clings around and grows out of the Irish barrows until, with almost the universality of that primeval forest from which Ireland took one of its ancient names, the whole isle and all within it was clothed with a nobler raiment, invisible, but not the less real, of a full and luxuriant history, from whose presence, all-embracing, no part was free. Of the many poetical and rhetorical titles lavished upon this country, none is truer than that which calls her the Isle of Song. Her ancient history passed unceasingly into the realm of artistic representation ; the history of one generation became the poetry of the next, until the whole island was illuminated and coloured by the poetry of the bards. Productions of mere fancy and imagination these songs are not, though fancy and imagination may have coloured and shaped all their subject matter, but the names are names of men and women who once lived and died in Ireland, and over whom their people raised the swelling rath and reared the rocky cromlech. In the sepulchral monuments their names were preserved, and in the performance of sacred rites, and the holding of games, fairs, and assemblies in their honour, the memory of their achievements kept fresh, till the traditions that clung around these places were enshrined in tales which were finally incorporated in the *Leabhar na Huidhré* and the *Book of Leinster*.

Pre-historic narrative is of two kinds—in one the imagination is at work consciously, in the other unconsciously. Legends* of the former class are the

* The Irish Ossianic literature leans in this direction.

product of a lettered and learned age. The story floats loosely in a world of imagination. The other sort of pre-historic narrative clings close to the soil, and to visible and tangible objects. It may be legend, but it is legend believed in as history, never consciously invented, and growing out of certain spots of the earth's surface, and supported by and drawing its life from the soil like a natural growth.

Such are the early Irish tales that cling around the mounds and cromlechs as that by which they are sustained, which was originally their source, and sustained them afterwards in a strong enduring life. It is evident that these cannot be classed with stories that float vaguely in an ideal world, which may happen in one place as well as another, and in which the names might be disarrayed without changing the character and consistency of the tale, and its relations, in time or otherwise, with other tales.

Foreigners are surprised to find the Irish claim for their own country an antiquity and a history prior to that of the neighbouring countries. Herein lie the proof and the explanation. The traditions and history of the mound-raising period have in other countries passed away. Foreign conquest, or less intrinsic force of imagination, and pious sentiment have suffered them to fall into oblivion ; but in Ireland they have been all preserved in their original fulness and vigour, hardly a hue has faded, hardly a minute circumstance or articulation been suffered to decay.*

The enthusiasm with which the Irish intellect seized

* In world-history the value of the Irish bardic literature is this, that it clings close to rath and cairn, the source of all ancient Aryan literature. In the *Iliad* and the *Nibelungen Lied* the life-cord has been cut.

upon the grand moral life of Christianity, and ideals so different from, and so hostile to, those of the heroic age, did not consume the traditions or destroy the pious and reverent spirit in which men still looked back upon those monuments of their own pagan teachers and kings, and the deep spirit of patriotism and affection with which the mind still clung to the old heroic age, whose types were warlike prowess, physical beauty, generosity, hospitality, love of family and nation, and all those noble attributes which constituted the heroic character as distinguished from the saintly. The Danish conquest, with its profound modification of Irish society, and consequent disruption of old habits and conditions of life, did not dissipate it; nor the more dangerous conquest of the Normans, with their own innate nobility of character, chivalrous daring, and continental grace and civilization; nor the Elizabethan convulsions and systematic repression and destruction of all native phases of thought and feeling. Through all these storms, which successively assailed the heroic literature of ancient Ireland, it still held itself undestroyed. There were still found generous minds to shelter and shield the old tales and ballads, to feel the nobleness of that life of which they were the outcome, and to resolve that the soil of Ireland should not, so far as they had the power to prevent it, be denuded of its raiment of history and historic romance, or reduced again to primeval nakedness. The fruit of this persistency and unquenched love of country and its ancient traditions, is left to be enjoyed by us. There is not through the length and breadth of the country a conspicuous rath or barrow of which we cannot find the traditional history pre-

served in this ancient literature. The mounds of Tara, the great barrows along the shores of the Boyne, the raths of Slieve Mish, Rathcrōgan, and Teltown, the stone caiseals of Aran* and Innishowen,† and those that alone or in smaller groups stud the country over, are all, or nearly all, mentioned in this ancient literature, with the names and traditional histories of those over whom they were raised.

The indigenous history of the surrounding nations commences with the Christian ages—that of Ireland runs back into the pre-Christian. The Irish bards, unlike those of Gaul, Britain, and we may add, Germany, handed over to the monks and mediæval scholars an immense mass of mingled history, tradition, and mythology, which the monks and Christianized bards were compelled to accept, and which to a certain extent, they have verified and established as indubitable.

The literary monuments in which is enshrined the ancient history of Ireland, though chronologically later than the corresponding monuments of Greece and of the Norse nations, are yet in fact more archaic. They cling close to and encircle the mounded tombs of gods and heroes. Other literatures have floated far away from that to which they owe their genesis. They resemble the full course of a stream which has had its source far away. The stream of the Irish bardic literature still lingers in the mountains which gave it birth. It is near the well-head.

* Photographs of these will be found in Miss Stokes' work on "Irish Architecture."

† The principal structure here is Ailech Neid, a painting of which is to be seen in the Royal Irish Academy.

The stone-circle, rath, mound, cromlech, pillar-stone, so far as I know, appear in no literature to-day, except the ancient literature of Ireland.

The pre-Christian period of Irish history presents difficulties from which the corresponding period in the histories of other countries is free. The surrounding nations escape the difficulty by having nothing to record. The Irish historian is immersed in perplexity on account of the mass of material ready to his hand. The English have lost utterly all record of those centuries before which the Irish historian stands with dismay and hesitation, not through deficiency of materials, but through their excess. Had nought but the chronicles been preserved, the task would have been simple. We would then have had merely to determine approximately the date of the introduction of letters, and allowing a margin on account of the bardic system and the commission of family and national history to the keeping of rhymed and alliterated verse, fix upon some reasonable point, and set down in order, the old successions of kings and the battles and other remarkable events. But in Irish history there remains, demanding treatment, that other immense mass of literature of an imaginative nature, illuminating with anecdote and tale the events and personages mentioned simply and without comment by the chronicler. It is this poetic literature which constitutes the stumbling-block, as it constitutes also the glory, of early Irish history, for it cannot be rejected and it cannot be retained. It cannot be rejected, because it contains historical matter which is consonant with and illuminates the dry lists of the chronologist, and it cannot be retained, for popular

poetry is not history ; and the task of distinguishing in such literature the fact from the fiction—where there is certainly fact and certainly fiction—is one of the most difficult to which the intellect can apply itself. That this difficulty has not been hitherto surmounted by Irish writers is no just reproach. For the last century, intellects of the highest attainments, trained and educated to the last degree, have been vainly endeavouring to solve a similar question in the far less copious and less varied heroic literature of Greece. Yet the labours of Wolfe, Grote, Mahaffy, Geddes, and Gladstone, have not been sufficient to set at rest the small question, whether it was one man or two or many who composed the Iliad and Odyssey, while the reality of the achievements of Achilles and even his existence might be denied or asserted by a scholar without general reproach. When this is the case with regard to the great heroes of the Iliad, I fancy it will be some time before the same problem will have been solved for the minor characters, and as it affects Thersites, or that eminent artist who dwelt at home in Hyla, being by far the most excellent of leather-cutters. When, therefore, Greek still meets Greek in an interminable and apparently bloodless conflict over the disputed body of the Iliad and still no end appears, surely it would be madness for any one to sit down and gaily distinguish true from false in the immense and complex mass of the Irish bardic literature, having in his ears this century-lasting struggle over a single Greek poem and a single small phase of the semi-historic life of Hellas.

In the present volume I hope to be able to give the student a correct, though inadequate account of the

general character of this literature on its psychological and literary, as well as upon its historical side.

It is to be regretted that probably not a tenth part of it has been as yet translated, and that even of that tenth, much is composed of very disjointed fragments imbedded in various publications. The causes which have led to this neglect are, however, at present steadily and swiftly passing away.

CHAPTER III.

IMPORTANCE OF THE MYTHICAL PERIOD IN THE HISTORY OF NATIONS.

So absolute is the tyranny of the imagination over the minds of men, that it is often precisely those portions of the history of a people which are not historical that attract the most profound attention and arouse the deepest feelings. Even within the limits of the historical period it is the imaginative treatment of persons and events which takes the strongest hold upon the world. It is the Socrates of Plato's dialogues, the Marc Antony of Shakspeare's drama and of Plutarch's anecdotes, the Alfred of pretty Anglo-Saxon myths, whom we really see and think of, and not the Socrates, Marc Antony, and Alfred of positive undeniable history. The legend-making faculty, and what is akin to it, never cease and never can cease. Romance, epic, drama, and artistic representation are at all times the points to which history continually aspires—there only its final development and efflorescence. Archæ-

ology culminates in history, history culminates in art.

This is true of persons and events falling within the scope of the most undeniable history, but it is when the great permanent universal feelings of a nation or race project themselves into appropriate types of human personality, moving freely in a congenial atmosphere and world, that the power of imagination is rightly known and its profound and penetrating effect fully felt. While perpetually teased and hampered by the critical and historical instinct, it works as it were in chains, and its results are proportionately trivial. To express the whole nature of a race or nation, the artist needs that absolute freedom which is only supplied by a complete escape from positive history and unyielding despotic fact. Then the results become so typical, and of such enduring value and importance, that not the historian alone, but all eager and vivid minds are irresistibly attracted thither by influences similar to those which attract us in storms, in the sea, in running water, in revolutionary epochs, and in all that seems to indicate abounding life, movement, and freedom.

Such an escape from the actual is supplied to some more favoured or more gifted nations in the possession of a great mythical age lying behind their progress through time, imparting to their lives its own greatness and glory, inspiring life and hope and a buoyancy which laughs at obstacles and will not recognise defeat. The very lawlessness and audacity of conception which characterize such imagined ages are ever welcome. They prove overflowing youth and hope, and point to a maturity of power. The Greek race performed

mightier achievements than the fabled labours of Heracles or of the mountain-rending Titans. The gigantic conceptions of heroism and strength, with which the forefront of Irish history is thronged, prove the great future of this race and land, of which the mere contemplation of the actual results of time might cause even the patriot to despair.

To the Greek bards who shaped the mythology of Hellas we must remotely attribute all the enormous influence which Greece has exercised on the world. But for them, the Greece that we know would not have been; without them the Iliad and Odyssey would never have arisen, nor the Athenian drama, nor Greek art, nor architecture. All of these, as we find them, are concerned with the gods and heroes who were the creations of pre-historic bards. It was they, namely, these pre-historic unremembered Greeks, who supplied the types, and the fire, ideality, and creative impulses. The great age of Hellas was not an accident, but an emergence into light, and a bursting as it were into flower of that which was generated and nursed in earlier obscurer centuries. Those rude elder forgotten bards were the root of all that floral magnificence of the Periclean and subsequent ages. That this is true of all the imaginative and artistic work of Greece is self-evident; but I believe it is no less true of Greek philosophy, and of the whole life of Hellas, as it exhibits itself in history. How all-controlling over the pre-historic Greek mind must have been the influence of the bards, the comparative study of the corresponding period of Irish history shows, with a clearness and fulness which cannot be elsewhere found. For centuries of the progress of the Hellenic mind,

the great tides and currents were bardic, religious, and imaginative. From those ages it emerges into the litten spaces of history, bringing with it such powers and ambitions as accrued to it during the centuries of the predominance of the bards.

As compared with the history of Greece, that of our own land is of course a small thing, its real greatness lying in the promise of the future, not in the actualities of the past; of which future, that far off mythic age is a prophecy. But no more than Grecian is Irish history comprehensible without a knowledge of those gods, giants, and heroes, with whose crowded cycles its pre-historic ages are filled. No such visible results have flowed to the world from the labours of the Irish bards as what has indirectly accrued from those of Orpheus, Musæus, and the other spiritual progenitors of the Greek race. The development of the Irish mind under the influence of the bards, was interrupted by the advent of Christianity at a very early age, impelled by the force of all the existing civilization of Europe. Had the intellectual and spiritual sovereignty of the Irish bards continued for a few centuries longer, I, for one, regarding the wonderful imaginative power evinced in the whole conception of that vast epos which forms the bardic history of Ireland, and the innumerable defined lofty or beautiful characters which it contains, feel as confident as one can well be concerning anything not actually realized, that results would have been forthcoming which would now be portion of the intellectual wealth of mankind.

Yet were the labours of the Irish bards considerable and well worthy of attention, and their influence upon

the history of this nation deep and far-reaching. In the first place, they have left behind the still extant imaginative literature, monuments of antiquity in the highest degree interesting and important. No other European country supplies records exhibiting phases of thought and civilization so archaic, as are revealed with regard to the Irish race, in this unique literature. Thus a great hiatus in European, and, more particularly, in Grecian history, is partially filled. We find in it a stage of mental and social development corresponding to that of Hellas in the centuries that preceded the age of Homer, and of which all monuments have been swept away.

Again, we must remember that the intellectual influence exercised by Ireland over the north-west of Europe, during the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries, is distinctly, though indirectly, traceable to the bards. It is not in the nature of things that a savage and untutored race should suddenly burst upon the world and assume the spiritual control of peoples who had been for centuries in contact with Roman influence. When the Christian missionaries landed in Ireland, they found a people whose intellectual, moral, and imaginative powers had been for many generations stimulated and aroused by their native bards.* But for them the Ireland of those centuries would have been impossible.

But perhaps the most valuable work achieved for Ireland by those ancient shapers of legend and heroic

* To what perfection the bardic intellect had arrived even then may be seen in the fine poems of *Dávac mac Ua Lugair*, a contemporary of St. Patrick. See Part xii., chap. 4.

tale, is like all that is best done in the world, incapable of being definitely grasped and clearly exhibited. Their best work is probably hidden in the blood and brain of the race to this day. Those antique singing men, with their imagined gods and super-human heroes, breathed into the land and people the gallantry and chivalrousness, the prevailing ideality, the love of action and freedom, the audacity and elevation of thought, which, underneath all rudeness and grotesquerie, characterizes those remnants of their imaginings, and which we would believe no intervening centuries have been powerful wholly to annul. Theirs, not the monks', was the *perfervidum ingenium Scotorum*.

I would also add when I consider the extraordinary stimulus which the perusal of that literature gives to the imagination, even in centuries like these, and its wealth of elevated and intensely human characters, that, as I anticipate, with the revival of Irish literary energy and the return of Irish self-esteem, the artistic craftsmen of the future will find therein and in unfailing abundance, the material of persons and sentiments fit for the highest purposes of epic and dramatic literature and of art, pictorial and sculptural.

To ignore or despise the bardic literature might have been possible in the last century, but it is not possible now when a wider culture and a more profound philosophy have taught men the lesson of which one would imagine they ought not to stand in need, viz., to respect their fathers. Before the end of the present century, it is probable that the whole of the extant bardic literature will have been translated and published. How far the bardic history and literature

enclose positive objective fact is a question of considerable interest and extreme difficulty ; nor does it permit certainly now and probably at no time of a satisfactory or final solution.

CHAPTER IV.

RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF THE IRISH.

It is probable that if the authentic traditions of all European nations so far as they related to those nations' remote ancestors had been preserved, they would have exhibited certain common features. In primitive societies the imagination is all in all, and the critical and scientific habit of mind is yet dormant. Nations, therefore, who have not yet reached the point of scientific and exact criticism, naturally and inevitably regard their remote ancestors as beings of superhuman dignity and power. Such is the universal tendency ; and where the early European literature has been preserved, traces of such a belief and of such a habit of mind are invariably manifested.

But the imagination when uncontrolled by the logical faculty is wilful and petulant, and is not consistent or true to itself. Consequently, the literary products of such an imagination are obscure, shifting and self-contradictory. When, however, such a nation, without having its continuity of growth intercepted, becomes logical and accurate, we may expect to see the vast mass of imaginative conceptions gradually reduced to order and teased and tortured in every way

so as to bring them into harmony, not only with themselves, but with the tone of thought and feeling prevailing at the time of the last redaction.

In the Irish mythology and the Irish heroic literature, the student is equally astonished, both at the chaos and at the order, at the vast wilderness as of shattered worlds, mere tangle and confusion, and also at the spacious and levelled ways, mountains cut through, yawning gulfs bridged over, embankments which keep back the shifting morass—indications of a bold scientific spirit working bravely amid the chaos. Mediæval Ireland was not scientific, but the elements and germ of science were there. It was logical, orderly, with a thirst for minuteness, chronology and succession, co-ordination and relation.

But the rationalism and logic of mediæval Ireland, though they deserve gratitude and respect inasmuch as they indicate mental qualities, but for which, doubtless, the mythological and heroic literature would never have been preserved at all, are primarily responsible for the cloud which hangs over our early history. Those monuments of intellectual engineering which traverse the land of gods and heroes do not end there; they travel broadly without break or check into the world of men and facts.

I think Ireland alone among the nations of the world exhibits as to its history, the same progress from the mythological and heroic to the mundane, not even excepting that of Greece, which comes next. In the history of Greece, there occurs between the two regions an era of mere barren names which indicate that here is debateable and uncertain land. On one side is the purple light of imagination, amid which loom and

glitter the heroes and the gods—a land illuminated by the mind of Hesiod and Homer and the great tragedians; on the other the clear dry light of history prevails. We see clearly that one is history and the other fiction. But in the progress of the Irish national record the purple light is never absent. The weird, the supernatural, the heroic, surround characters as certain as Brian Borôm—events as trustworthy as the Norman Invasion. The bards never relinquished their right to view their history with the eyes of poets, to convert their kings into heroes and adorn battles and events with hues drawn from mythology; hence, the great stumbling-block.

Of European countries, Greece and Ireland only exhibit in their literary-historical monuments that regular progression of thought which ought to have if it did not characterize all the rest. The early traditions of Italy seem to have been lost in quite pre-historic times. The Rome that we know started into existence like a seedling out of some pre-existing perished civilization. Those of Spain and France were obliterated by the latinization of those countries. The traditions of Britain, which probably would never have assumed a large national character, owed their extinction to the same cause. Those of Scotland, owing to the predominance of Ireland and Irish thought, were lost or merged in those of this country. The Scandinavian and German still exist of European and world-wide importance indeed, but not so blended and intermingled with the history of any one German or Scandinavian nation as to fill the same place as the Irish and Greek mythological narrative.

Ireland not only escaped subjugation at the hands

of Rome, but accomplished such a unity* of thought and feeling as impressed upon the traditions a large national complexion, so that her history, like that of Greece, blends imperceptibly with her mythology. The historian is aware of the existence of a point of contact, but he cannot detect it. He may, however, trace back the current of history to a point at which demonstrative proof fails ; but it is manifest that it would be most unscientific to declare, that because proof is not forthcoming for what immediately precedes this, mythology then commences, and fact is succeeded by fancy.

Such an examination of the current of our national history I propose to undertake in this volume, after having presented the reader with a rapid panoramic sketch of the succession of events, races and persons, with which the mythical period of our history is thronged, and with a more minute account of those centuries in which it is evident that the mythological is blending with the historical narrative.

In the mythological monuments of Greece, the Olympian gods are preceded by a single race of beings variously known as Titans, Giants, Earth-born ones, beyond whom are seen only Night, Heaven, Earth, Chaos, and such physical entities. In the corresponding literature of Ireland we find the gods, whose name in our monuments is *Tuatha De Danān*, preceded by various mythological races, beyond whom are no physical entities.

I remark that Grote, in his history of Greece, devotes

* A certain martial solidarity was certainly accomplished by the Irish in the fourth century, sufficient to justify Claudian in stating that the Irish monarch raised up the whole of Ireland against the Romans.

all his opening chapters to a large superficial account of the mythical ages. Of course, such ages being the product of imagination, or springing from sources far deeper than imagination, namely, that whence religion arises, can be only properly studied in the native monuments, but that the student should be supplied with a cursory and general survey of the whole ground is essential for the right examination of any such monuments, or for the perusal of the results of criticism as it deals with them.

Thus, in any event, and no matter how the Irish historical student desires to approach the early history of this country, some such general survey is requisite. In my own treatment it is unavoidable, for I desire both the critical comments of the present series and the epic narrations of the imaginative series to be read in connection with and in reference to the history of those ages, as they have been formulated by the bards and early historians of Ireland.

My first task then, must plainly be to outline that primal mythical period which lies beyond the epoch of the gods, after which I purpose to sketch the history and character of the divine races, the Tuatha de Danān, and thence pass through the region of the semi-divine and heroic into the domain of pure history. Finally, I shall determine, approximately of course, the point at which, working backward, from verifiable facts, history grows dubious, and the point at which it blends with what may have been at one time, and in another form, history, but as it has reached us is plainly mythical.

PART IV.

Predecessors and Progenitors of the Irish gods.

CHAPTER I.

PRELIMINARY SKETCH OF EARLY IRISH HISTORY, LEGENDARY AND AUTHENTIC.

BEFORE entering minutely into the various branches of the inquiry before us, I think it will not be amiss to supply the reader with a rapid sketch of the general nature and extent of the ground to be traversed.

The traditional bardic history of Ireland commences with an account of various mythical races, cycles of ancient dim-remembered gods and demigods, once potent over the imagination and spiritual sensibilities of the people, but who at the time of the final redaction of the history had grown somewhat dim and faint in the distance. These* are known as the Ceasairians, early Fomorians, Partholanians, and Nemedians.

As these pass away, there emerges upon the scene a gigantic but hardly supernatural race of Titanic beings named Fir-bolgs† or giant men, and who correspond in our history with the Earth-born enemies of the Olympian gods in the traditional history of Greece.

* Part iv.

† Part iv., chap. 8.

Finally, come the Irish gods, under the title of Tuatha De Danān* "concealed in dark clouds," invisible, immortal, wielders of magic power. At Moy Turat in the west they meet in deadly conflict the great host of the Fir-bolgie giants, whom, with a slaughter of one hundred thousand, they finally overthrow, and either expel or enslave. So Ireland passes into what in Greek tradition was known as the golden age, when the gods dwelt visibly in Erin, exercising over the land a material sovereignty.

Now arises either a younger race of the Tuatha De Danān gods, or of semi-divine heroes and champions, the sons† of Milesius, Heber, Heremon, and their brethren, who conquer the elder gods and expel them from the material sovereignty of the land, compelling them to take shelter for ever in the veil of invisibility, which was one of their chief attributes.

At the time of the genesis of this portion of the history there was a considerable communication with Spain, and although there is little doubt that originally the sons of Milesius were indigenous gods or heroes, the legend so shaped itself that these Milesian conquerors were represented as Spaniards.§

In the scholastic and monastic periods the historians, eager to connect the ancestry of the Irish with an eastern source, and to abolish the ethnic pedigrees which connected the Milesians with the

* Part v. † Near Cong, County Mayo. Great tombs here still.

‡ Part vii., chap 4.

§ We see here a reflection of those ages prior to the appearance of Rome in the north-west of Europe, and when Ireland's foreign trade was with Spain, alluded to by Avienus, Part ii., chap. 2. After this Ireland found an opening for commerce with or through Gaul.

gods, framed for them a long ancestry, in which the names are ethnic-Irish, but whose alleged origin is Scythian, and whose fabricated history teems with Biblical and classical allusions and incidents.

The next phase of Irish history exhibits a long line of alleged Kings of all Ireland, the explanation of which is as follows :—

At the time of the final redaction of the history, Ireland, penetrated as it was with the fame of gods and heroes, held innumerable cycles of ballad poetry, whose protagonistæ were such ancient gods and heroes, having a topical fame frequently ascending to universality. A multitude of the more important of these seemed to the early unscientific historians to require mention in the annals of the country as ancient Kings of Ireland. Hence, the long and all but interminable roll of Milesian monarchs, the supposed posterity of Milesius, descending through a period of some twelve hundred years.

But for this incursion into the national record of topical heroes, the Irish annalist would probably have represented the age of the gods as having ceased about a hundred years before the birth of Christ, and the age of the heroes or demi-gods as after that commencing.

In the recorded history the heroic age coincides with the Incarnation. Then stands out the great figure of Conairy Mōr,* then the Red Branch† Knights of the north, the Hounds or Champions of Ulla, under their king, Concobar mac Nessa, and with Cuculain, son of Sualtam, or of the god Lu, for their matchless and unconquerable Hero ; then, in the west, Meave, the

* Part viii., chap. 2.

† Part ix.

semi-divine warrioress and queen, with the seven Maineyns and the heroes of the Olnemacta ; then, in the south, Curoi mac Dary and the heroes of the Clan Dēga, all, I believe, in the original uncorrupted traditions, closely connected in descent with the ethnic gods.

As the age of heroes with its flashing glories grows dim and wanes, and as the deep heroic note fails, a new cycle arises, blending with verifiable history. It starts with the Atticottic* revolution, so called, *i.e.*, the rebellion of the subject races against the Milesian conquerors, A.D. 54. Out of the confusion emerges the figure of Tuhall Tectmar, the first historic King of Tara, from whom runs forward the great Temairiant cycle of successive kings, historical as to their names, order, and descent, but arrayed in fabulous glories, and dignified with unhistoric deeds and achievements. These are Tuhall Tectmar, A.D. 74, his son Felim Rectmar, A.D. 113, and his son, the great Conn of the Hundred Battles, A.D. 125, whose epic wars with the South of Ireland I have related at some length, chiefly to show how Irish history shaped itself in the imagination of the race.

From Conn the line of historic kings runs forward thus : Conn of the Hundred Fights, his son Art the Solitary, A.D. 166, his son Cormac mac Art, 227, contemporary with the period of the greatest prosperity in the Roman Empire, and reproducing in Ireland a state of things reflecting somewhat the wide-spread influence and civilization of Rome, then penetrating the north of Europe.

* Revolution? Part x., chap. 1.

† Adjective formed from Temair, nominative case of Tara.

‡ Part xi.

Now, too, rise into fame the heroes of Ossian, Finn, Diarmid, Oscar, and their mighty brethren, an unhistoric cycle, unfolding itself within an age whose chief features are historic, and so resembling that European romantic literature which deals with Charlemain and his Paladins, or, in a smaller way, the ballad cycle relating the achievements of Robin Hood and his merry-men.

Shortly after, with the decay of the Roman empire, the free nations beyond the marches who preserved their martial spirit unimpaired, and with minds ever nourished by heroic song and tradition, break across all the boundaries, and pour themselves like a flood over the Roman world. In this great movement the Scotie-Irish took part, and with the Northern Picts in their train, and in conjunction with the Saxons, overpower and expel the Romans out of Britain. The Irish kings of this age are Niall Mór* of the Nine Hostages, A.D. 378, and his nephew Dathi, son of Fiechra, A.D. 405.

In the age of these kings, Scotie supremacy was paramount in the British isles, while the verses of Claudian show that the dread of this warlike Scotie-Irish Ierné was one of the great European facts of the day, and duly acknowledged in the very centre of the Empire.

Thus the mind of North-western Europe was prepared, owing to the martial and political influence of the island, for the rise of that scholastic and monastic Ireland which succeeded. The spiritual predominance of the island was preceded by success

* Part xii., chap. 4.

in arms and a wide-spread martial fame, an exodus of Irish conquerors, an influx of captives and booty, preceded an exodus of missionaries, an influx of students and artists.

In the present volume I shall trace in outline those mythical and heroic ages which lead up to the period of Irish martial predominance in this quarter of Europe, indicating, as I proceed, the nature of those moral causes which prepared and necessitated it, and so conduct the history to the verge of those ages in which the heroic and martial spirit is transformed into a milder and more spiritual temper, with whose manifestations my next volume will be chiefly concerned.

CHAPTER II.

CEASAIR AND CEASAIRIAN DEITIES.

ACCORDING to the Irish bards the most ancient name of Ireland was *Inis na Veeva*—the Isle of Woods—possessing therefore a soil which needed a frequent use of the axe ere her plains were rendered fit for pasture-land or tillage. As we travel down through the chronicles we find, at various points, honourable mention of ancient gods and heroes who distinguished themselves as extensive fellers of forests. Indeed, amid all the splendour and chivalry of the heroic, and all the weirdness and vastness of the supernatural races, the humbler and more useful labours of the real or imagined benefactors of the island are gratefully recorded in the strangely interesting literature of the

bardic historians, from that ancient god* who cleared from forest the plain of the Liffey and fed his flocks upon its shores, to the historic king† who relieved the labours of his concubine toiling painfully at the quern, by erecting on the stream Nemnech, which flows out eastward from Tara, the first water-mill built in Ireland. This one‡ repelled the sea from Murthemney, forming the district which is now Louth; another§ taught men to ride on horses; a third|| first discovered and smelted gold in Ireland; a fourth¶ brought cows and bulls from Britain, when all the cattle in the island were destroyed by a plague. Innumerable are the bardic references to such beneficent works.

To this Isle of Woods first arrived a colony fleeing out of the east of Europe, the most ancient of those mythical races who preceded the advent of the gods. Bith, Lara,** and Fintann†† were their kings, but, from Ceasair, their Queen, the race has taken its name. It is recorded in the annals as the invasion of Ceasair.

This race, according to the monkish historians, was swept away by the Deluge, but I doubt not that the true ethnic traditions represented this remote Ceasair,

* Partholan.

† Cormac mac Art, *Rex Hiberniæ*, 227.

‡ The Dagda Mór, or Great Father, the Zeus of the Tuatha De Danán.

§ Lu, the Long-handed, the patron-god of Cuculain, and his imagined father, hero of the second battle of Moy Tura.

|| Creidené, the smith of the Tuatha De Danán. His forge was represented to have been in the heart of the forests of Glen Cullen, near Dublin. This is also recorded of Iuchadan, tempore Tihernmas. — See Part vi., chap. 5.

¶ Finn Mac Cool, a semi-mythical hero, appearing in an age which, in its main features, is historical. — Part xi., chap. 2.

** The tomb of this Lara is a high conical cairn on the sea coast, at Ardamine, Co. Wexford.

†† This was the Salmon-god of Irish mythology, and the patron of learned men.

and the gods of her cycle, as the root whence sprang all the gods and heroes of later times.

Of these Ceasairian deities, one, Fintann, the patron of poets and historians, survived in the imagination and belief of the people, not only into historic times, but down to the age of the decay of all fairy-lore. In every age and epoch Fintann duly reappears, the long-memoried historian of all the changes and revolutions of the Gael.

CHAPTER III.

REMARKS ON THE FOREGOING.

THE great epos of the bardic history of Ireland opens with the advent of Queen Ceasair and the Ceasairian deities. The true ethnic history and origin of this dynasty is perhaps lost, we seem now to possess but the ashes of the cycle. When in the early historic ages all the bardic cycles and all the topical traditions began to be collected and formed into a continuous sequence, a certain rude knowledge of the geography of Europe, and of the history of great European nations was prevalent. From the time when men knew anything at all of countries and peoples outside of their own, they felt themselves compelled to bring their history into some sort of relationship with them. In the mythical history of Greece, for example, there is a great deal more in the Trojan war and the derivation of early Greek civilization from Egypt and Phœnicia, than a mere tradition of something that actually took place.

In the bardic history of Ireland the work of this spirit is apparent on every page. The limits of their sea-surrounded home did not supply to our ancestors sufficient scope for the play of imagination and of the sympathies. To gratify this imperative desire, the old narrow traditions are expanded into a sort of world-wide significance, and the old beliefs outraged or distorted when they oppose the working of this generous principle. To be a portion of the human family, and bear a part in the general progress of man and of the world, those bards, ethnic or Christian, who effected the last redaction of our mythical history, regarded as the duty and natural function of the island and the race. Thus England, Wales, and Scotland, Germany, France, and Norway, Spain, Italy, Greece, Scythia, Egypt, and Asia Minor have all, more or less, affected the purer though narrower stream of insular tradition and local belief, producing results grotesque, indeed, but from which we cannot withhold our sympathies, when we remember the spirit which prompted those distortions of the ancient historic or literary monuments. Nor need the scientific inquirer affect any considerable wrath upon the subject, for all those portions of the bardic history which were added, through the operation of Classical and Christian ideas, are as easily separable from the remainder as incrustations of earth from a piece of solid ore.

This Queen Ceasair, who, with her people, first took possession of Ireland, we know did not come from the east of Europe, but was some ancient Irish heroine, expanded by the imagination and spiritual faculties of our ancestors into superhuman and divine dimensions, and was probably an imagined descendant of still more

ancient lost cycles of divinities and heroes. Her ethnic pedigree was probably cut short in Christian ages, lest it should conflict with received notions of the age of the world.

The spot where she first touched Ireland was Dunamarc,* a small village between Bantry and Glengariffe, at the upper end of Bantry Bay. In the Bardic history, where the operation of those disturbing influences to which I have alluded is not apparent, every recorded fact has its own peculiar significance, arising, as it invariably does, not from the fancies of individuals, but growing out of popular traditions written into the history by men who believed them to be true, and who inherited them from others, by whom they were not consciously imagined. Thus, I will be bold enough to assert, that in the mythical history of Ireland every spot of Irish soil mentioned is either the locus of some ancient tomb or temple, or was once a spot teeming with traditional lore, which thus succeeded in procuring for itself mention in the history. Scholarship, criticism, and archæology, from year to year, continue to justify, in a sense, the unhesitating faith with which our ancient chroniclers passed down from generation to generation the recorded history as it had descended to themselves.

That the Ceasairian legend formed a great national divine cycle, is shown from the fact that the landing of Ceasair was in the south-west of Ireland, that the tomb of the chief personage, after herself, was in the east,† that the mountains haunted by her father were in the centre,‡

* One of the ethnic mounds is found in this place on the edge of the sea.

† Ardamine, Co. Wexford.

‡ The mountains of Bith, now Slieve Beagh.

and that her own tomb was in Connaught. The cycle of which Ceasair is the centre, probably, at one time, extended all over the Island, and was as national and typical as that which revolves around Queen Meave in the great Ultonian and Olnemactian* heroic cycle of the age of the Incarnation.

In studying these divine cycles, it is interesting to mark how divinities once famous, often retire into complete oblivion, leaving only a name for the annalists, or sink from national into local significance, or finally degenerate from an immortal god into a mortal hero.

CHAPTER IV.

FINTANN, THE SALMON-GOD.

OF this Ceasairian cycle, however, one god, at all events, made good his hold on the bardic imagination, his speciality of poetry giving him an immense advantage over the other Ceasairians in the history-loving bookish ages which accompanied or succeeded the introduction of Christianity. This was Fintann, the poet, patron of bards and learned men, the long-remembered historian of the island.

In mediæval times two theories obtained as to the preservation of the history of the early inhabitants of the isle, one of these was, that Fintann from time to time appeared visibly among the Gael, and taught history to the bards and others. Thus he is represented as coming

* Connaught, i.e., the country of the descendants of Conn, was, in the age of Cuicléin, the country of the children of Oll-negma, i.e., the land of the Ollnegmacta.

up from his favourite haunts in the mountains of Kerry, and relating the history of Ireland to St. Patrick.

According to the second theory, Amergin the Druid, who accompanied the Milesian invasion from Spain, deliberately set himself to the accumulation and preservation of the history of the pre-Milesian races.

Fintann's tomb, by Lough Derg, on the Shannon, did not contain his restless sprite, for he is seen and heard of at many points in the island, and is identified by the bards with the genius of history and antiquity.

Queen Ceasair and her people, write the chroniclers, were swept away in the Deluge; Fintann, however, transformed himself into a salmon, and safely roamed the depths of the ocean until its subsidence. On the hill of Tara he was left dry by the retiring flood, when he renewed his human form.

"I am Fintann the poet,
I am not the salmon of one* flood,
Where I was raised after that, i.e., the Noachic deluge,
Was upon the sod-fort of Tara."

The casual student of the Irish bardic remains will see in this merely a fanciful explanation of how it came to pass that a race swept away by the flood, succeeded in transmitting its history to future ages. This, of course, has determined some features of the story, but

* This probably means that he could at any time, and often did, assume the form of a salmon. A certain sense of proportion and gradation characterizes all the mythical history. Thus, the pre-Milesian races, the gods, transform themselves and one another into birds, animals, lakes, &c. The Ultonian heroes, who are, I think, demi-gods, and close in time to the age of the gods, use magic weapons, and assume terrible appearances without actual metamorphosis. The later heroes are simply heroes and brave men, though of great size. Such are Finn and his comrades.

the connection between Fintann and the salmon, is an essential portion of the Irish mythology, and the story thus forms an excellent example of what cannot be too much insisted upon, the vital significance of even the smallest and most ludicrous statements in the literature. None are inventions of individuals; they mingle with and are part of one great living tissue, having the same life with it, and revealing only their meaning in relation to the whole.

Amongst the mythological ideas of the ancient Irish, one frequently occurring is, that there existed in the Irish rivers, or in the seas around Erin, a salmon endowed with all knowledge, and that to whoever might catch and eat him that knowledge would be communicated. Finn* mac Cool, while he studied with the ancient bard beside the pool of Linn-Fecc, upon the Boyne, caught and ate, or tasted this fish. In the sacred wells at the source of the Boyne and the Shannon, and at the time that the mysterious hazel-tree† shed its wisdom-giving nuts, this salmon used to appear and devour the fruit, lest any should meet them afterwards floating upon the river. He is the salmon of knowledge, often referred to by the bards, under a set formula, corresponding to the Homeric :—

Græc. "Had I an iron tongue and lungs of brass."

Galic. "Even if I were the Salmon of Knowledge I could not,"
&c.

Now, Fintann, the weird bard of the Ceasairian cycle, is identified with the Salmon of Knowledge, and so, naturally, the bardo-Christian story above told, was

* Part xi., chap. 2.

† Part vi., chap. 2.

determined to the form in which we find it. The idea of the Noachic deluge intrudes into the pure ethnic mythus.

The historian of the battle of Moy Lēna quotes as his authority for the incidents of the war this Ceasairian Fintann, who, on a rationalistic interpretation of the bardic history, ought to have perished some two thousand years before :—

“ As was sung by the Salmon of all Knowledge, the possessor of all intelligence, and the jewel manifestly rich in all history and in all truth, namely, Fintann the prophetic, the truly-acute, and the truly-intelligent.”*

The avatars of this god are too numerous to be recorded. Learning, amongst the ancient Irish, was exalted to a height almost if not quite as great as heroism. The ideal monarch, Conairy Mōr, presents the blended appearance of king and bard. Concobar mac Nessa, the great captain of the Ulster Red Branch, unlike the mere heroes, wears the beard of a learned man ; and Cormac mac Art wrote a book of laws and royal precepts. These are the greatest of the ethnic kings, and, to all, the bardic qualities are ascribed.

To such a people this Fintann would, of course, assume proportions of the greatest importance, and be the theme of frequent laudation and reference. In the wars of Cuculain and Queen Meave, a great northern champion, Cethern is wounded. Among the physicians who attend him the Ceasairian Fintann appears. Medical science, in those days, was but a branch of

* Battle of Moy-Leana, R.L.A., p. 97. This battle is alluded to in Part x., chap. 5.

druidism, dealing largely in charms and incantations, and therefore in poetry, which accounts for the apparition of Fintann in the character of a physician.

In the war between the gods and giants, that is, between the Tuatha De Danān and the Fir-bolgs, the Fir-bolgs send for Fintann to advise them. He comes to Moy Tura, with his thirteen sons,* and gives them counsel.

In the sixth century Dermot, King of Ireland, summons the wisest men in the realm to a council. They decline to advise until Fintann has been summoned too. Fintann subsequently appeared in the council, and related his own history.† Of course, at one time, all the pre-Milesian characters were regarded as ever-living, but the idea was associated with Fintann to a later date than the others.

CHAPTER V.

PARTHOLAN AND PARTHOLANIAN DEITIES.—FIRST APPEARANCE OF THE FOMORIANS.

AFTER Ceasair comes a new race, led by Partholān, who rules all Ireland from the neighbourhood of the Liffey. Now first the custom and laws of hospitality were introduced into Ireland, the invention of ale having opened men's hearts, also, and, doubtless owing

* See O'Curry's "Manners and Customs," Vol. iii., p. 60.

† "Manners and Customs," Vol. iii., p. 61. The history of all the Irish kings and chiefs, as long as the bardic system lasted, is intertwined with such mythical decorations.

to the same invigorating beverage, the institution and regulation of the duello. As the Partholánians spread themselves over the island, they found an obstacle to their sway more dangerous than the wild beasts and the huge impassable forests, for now, first by name, we find mention of the terrible race of the Fomorians, a weird giant breed, descendants, perhaps, of Ceasair, or of Partholán's* own ancestors. Unlike the civilized invaders, who plough and reap, feed flocks and herds, these wild Fomorian gods live by the chase, fishing, and fowling. Their Queen is Lot,† her stronghold at the estuary of the Shannon, and their chief warrior Cical, "the rough and knocker-kneed."

This is the first appearance of the Fomorians, who, henceforward, are never absent from the literature, as it deals with gods and heroes. This fierce weird race, gloomy, terrible, oppressive, like the Lotuns of Norse mythology, form at all times a sinister and sombre element in the progress of the divine and heroic cycles. Cical and his warriors wage long and

* In one ancient poem, I find Partholán himself mentioned as a Fomorian. As the early history came to be formulated, various branches of the mythological races came to be regarded as human and mundane, warred upon by weird beings and demons, such as the Fomorians. The Irish historiographers are astray here. All the pre-Milesian races, no matter how treated in the histories, are supernatural, and either gods, or beings who having been once gods, declined from their dignity, through the rise of younger divine cycles, and came to be regarded as giants of the old time, overpowered by gods.

† In the age of Cuoulain, this Lot appears, with others, as a physician, at the bed-side of a wounded Ultonian. This would be, according to the annals, about 2000 years after the age of Partholán. In reading the bardic literature, we should never be surprised to see the reappearance of any individual of the pre-Milesian races. They are all supernatural and exempt from death. This consideration solves many discrepancies, and shows the logical and self-consistent character of the bardic literature. The student would otherwise see in such facts mere confusion, and evidence that the traditions were not fully formulated in the bardic mind.

fierce wars against Partholān, with what result and with what incidents I cannot tell; for that statement of the chronicles, that Partholān and his people were swept away by a plague, is to be regarded as an instance of monkish hostility, not as an ethnic tradition.

The account of the Partholanian cycle given by Keatinge is very bald. Amongst the few facts recorded are the names of his oxen, his labourers, his merchants, his druids, &c. His four sons are identical with the four sons of Heber in the Milesian cycle, from which I have been led to the conclusion that the sons of Milesius were once divinities, a fact which is strengthened by the appearance of gods in their pedigrees.

The Partholanian cycle was doubtless very ancient, and very copious and celebrated. When the literature is fully explored, many passages relating to him and his people will certainly be discovered.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FOMORIANS.

THE Partholanian cycle is chiefly remarkable as containing the first reference to a race of deities or supernatural beings, who play an immense part in the whole of the bardic national mythus.

The following simple and beautiful narration of Keatinge, charged though it be with that false mediæval rationalistic spirit, indicates the first appearance of the Fomorians in the bardic history :—

"There is an account in some authors, though of no credit with the Irish antiquaries, of a sort of inhabitants in the island before Partholán brought over his colony. These people were under the dominion of Cical, the son of Niul, the son of Garf, the son of Umör, who gave a name to the mountain Slieve Umör,* whose mother was Lot Luaimnech, and they lived two hundred years by fishing and fowling on the coast. Upon the arrival of Partholán and his people, there was a bloody battle fought between them at Moy Itha,† where Cical and his whole army were destroyed. The place where Cical landed with his followers is said to be Inver Domnan. He came over in fifty ships, and had fifty men and fifty women in each ship."

As to the precise derivation of the name Fomorian, Irish scholars do not seem agreed. The most probable seems to be Fo, a prince, Mör, mighty; but whatever the derivation, their character as supernatural beings is perfectly clear. If princes, they were not princes of this world; and if mighty, it was with supernatural power.

Through the whole of the mythological, and even semi-historic cycles, we are ever conscious of the presence of this race. Accompanying the whole progress of the national bardic epos, the Fomorians are ever beheld appearing, disappearing, conquering, being conquered, with hasty incursions out of their

* All the chief Irish mountains are connected with ancient mythological personages. A hero was first honoured around his cairn. His tumulus was his house. As the hero expanded into a god, he became associated with some neighbouring mountain. The connection of gods with mountains appears in all literatures. On many Irish mountains there still exist cairns and cromlechs. It seems more probable that these are of the nature of temples raised in honour of one who had been a hero but was now a god than mere tombs erected over king or chief.

† On this plain, Ith, uncle of Milesius, was slain by the gods (see Part vii., chap. 4.) Those sacred mound-strewn plains are frequently connected with diverse successive cycles. They are the *officina decorum et heroum*. Such too, I believe, was the Troad and plain of Ilium.

own weird land and rapid retreats, but never set down in the annals and histories as actual legitimate occupiers and rulers of the island. If they do rule it is by force, not by acknowledged right. The annalist seems to protest against their authority and to be pleased at their expulsion or disappearance. The Partholanian gods wage war against the Fomorians and yield place to the Nemedians; the Nemedians wage war against the Fomorians and are succeeded by the Firbolgs; the Firbolgs wage war on the Fomorians and are succeeded by the Tuatha De Danān; the Tuatha De Danān wage war against the Fomorians and yield place to the Milesians; and through the long Milesian record the Fomorians are still visible. Battles against the Fomorians are credited to various early Milesian kings. In the heroic and subsequent ages they are also seen. Cuculain, the Ultonian hero, is brought from Ireland into fairy-land* to defend the gods against these terrible foes; and even in the Ossianic cycle whose locus is the third century of our era, Finn mac Cool and his warriors are made the subject of Fomorian wiles. Thus, no matter what races of gods or heroes occupy the soil of Erin, the dread Fomorian powers are ever at hand to vex and harass.†

Now the Fomorians, though one might not at first suppose so, are not an absolutely distinct race lying outside and beyond other divine races, the connection

* *I.e.*, the enchanted world of the gods.

† In the elder literature, the Fomorians are hideous and terrible; in the later they are generally beautiful wizard beings. In the fairy-world of the mediæval bards they occupy territories distinct from the Tuatha De Danān, but have the same amiability and beauty.

of whom with the soil of Erin, is more intimate and clear. Their pedigrees interpenetrate with the latter at various points, so that they are seen to be only diverse manifestations of the same power or a different branch of the same divine stem. For example, the Dagda Mōr, the Zeus of the Tuatha De Danān divinities, is a great-grandson of Ned, a Fomorian deity; and Lu-Lamfáda, a contemporary god of the same race, is son of a Fomorian goddess, Ethleen, while Balor, their antagonist, King of the Fomorians, is a grandson of the same Ned.*

Again Cical, King of the Fomorians, against whom Partholān wages war, is grandson of Umōr, while a Firbolgic race of heroes appearing in the wars of Cuculain are also descendants of this Umōr, and called the Clan Humōr; and Cuculain himself is represented as being grandson of a Fomorian queen. The fact is, that all these pre-historic races are branches of the same family tree—all streams flowing from the same deep well-head of religious and imaginative feeling in the minds of the ancient Irish.

But the peculiar characteristics and distinctive attributes of the Fomorian peoples, whence did these arise? The mythological imagination of the bards seems to have worked somehow in this way. Around the tombs of great kings and warriors, the co-operating imaginations of many minds evolved the idea of immense champions and heroes. The bardic confraternity passing to and fro, vivifying, co-ordinating, connecting the topical traditions and local results of imagination, evolved a cycle of such champions banded

* Ned Slaughter.

together by some unifying principle of interest or race, such as the Ossianic cycle of Finn and his warriors, the Ultonian cycle of Cuculain and the Knights of the Red Branch. These cycles, however, are on the verge of, or within the historic age, and advanced no further. They are heroic, not divine cycles.

A group of champions thus formed becomes potent over all and dominates the age. But they are still impelled forward by the breath of that bardic spirit which first created them, till at length they become champions worthy to be matched with the divine powers. Finally, they reduce and overpower the gods and form a new divine cycle, putting all things known and capable of attack under their feet.

But as one wave has hardly spent itself, when another rolls in upon it from the deep, so a new cycle of heroes growing, gathering fast, follows, borne forward, as they themselves had been, by the impulse of bardic genius and the breath of a national enthusiasm.

By them they are conquered and expelled from the material possession of Erin, but such a hold have they taken upon the mind of the bards, that, though defeated, they do not melt utterly away and disappear. They assume a form of existence still more spiritual and remote. They retreat into Tir-na-n-ōg,* Tir-na-m-beo,† or Tir-na-Fomoroh. They have not the physical might and strength, the hugeness, material splendour, visible sovereignty of their conquerors, but retain a certain weird subtlety and wizard skill, dwelling remote from Erin, or invisible in Erin, strong in

* The land of the young.

† The land of life.

enchantments and magic arts, with strange powers of transformation, full of guile, practising elvish arts, and thus satisfying the fancy and love of mystery of the bards and romancers, while their mighty conquerors feed the imagination, appeasing men's longing for the awful and sublime.* Such, in those epochs of the bardic history, where we can see the growth and various phases of imaginative thought is the mode, and such are the various steps and transformations, the processes of growth and decay, by which the Fir-Shee,† races of ancient Erin were successively evolved.

Now, it is with reference to their expulsion and conquest by younger and mightier races, and with reference to their more remote and spiritual character afterwards, that the name Fomorian is ever applied. A Fomorian, as such, is not a man, a hero, or a potent and actual god, holding undisputed and lordly possession of the soil of Erin. His Olympus is, as it were, tottering beneath his feet, while the earth quakes with the advance of irresistible younger gods, gigantic and irresistible, comparable to the Red Branch heroes, or the huge warriors of Ossian, or he is a weird mysterious being, living apart from men and gods, somewhere in space, gifted with strange wizard powers, unable to conquer, but able to harass, vex, and annoy. For example, with reference to Partholān and the race ruling Erin from the Hill of Tallaght, Cical and his

* Thus frequently, though not always, the heroes appear greater than their immortal assistants, as in the *Iliad*; though a conventional superiority is attached to the gods, the heroes are in every way nobler and more sublime.

† Fir = men, Shee, *Gaelic*, Sidhe = weird beings. Spirits the Fir-Shee races were not, but strong substantial men and women, having superhuman stature and superhuman power.

people are naturally entitled Fomorian. In the old native literature, ere touched by the deforming hand of monks and Christianized bards, the Queen Ceasair and her people were probably conquered by Cical and his heroes. Thus the latter form an intervening cycle coming between that Queen and Partholān. With reference to him Ceasair would be Fomorian, though I have not found the name applied to her. With reference to Partholān Cical is rightly known by this name, and with reference to succeeding races Partholān and the Partholarians received also this title.

Then the Tuatha De Danān and the Fomoroh resemble one another in being supernatural, but while the Fomorians are more remote, more terrible, and dangerous, the Tuatha De Danān live actually in Erin. If the Fæd* Fia were removed, men might see them at any moment.

It was necessary for imaginative purposes to keep the Tuatha De Danān and Fomorian races distinct, even after both had retired or been driven out of the material possession of Erin. As, to the bards, war was the noblest employment for men, so they could not well imagine their gods as existing without enemies and resulting conflict. Thus the Fomorians and the Tuatha De Danān, though dwelling remote from the visible world, and in the depths of the weird and supernatural, are hostile to each other and wage an undying strife.

* The veil of invisibility.

CHAPTER VII.

GODS OF THE NEMEDIAN CYCLE.

NEMED, the first cousin of Partholān, is monarch of the next cycle, that of the Nemedian gods. He and his five* sons having taken possession of the island, attacked the primeval forests and cleared many plains. Now, too, we read for the first time, of what is referred to frequently in the annals, viz. : the supernatural eruption of lakes and rivers.

As I show later on, the existing literature contains no world-mythus or theory of the formation of the heavens and the earth. The extant mythology deals only with the formation of certain natural features of the island. That aquatic mythology grew up in this way. Sometimes a hero after his apotheosis was not relegated to an adjoining mountain as his habitation, but to an adjoining lake or river ; thus were created the genii of the waters. How these genii came so to reside there was explained in two ways ; according to the first, they were converted into the lake or river by the action of some more powerful being ; according to the second, at the digging of the hero's or heroine's grave, the water sprang forth, and became, as it were, his place of abode, as the cairn and rath were regarded as in some mysterious way the house or home, *scilicet*, temple of others.

These genii, however, preserved their places in the

* Starn, Iarbanel the Prophet, Anind, Fergus the Red-Sided, and Arthur.

great heroic or divine cycles of which they were once a part.

Once more, during the Nemedian occupation, the weird Fomorians intervene, and all over Ireland we seem to hear the crash of their hosts contending with the children of Nemed. Finally, in the great battle of Cnamross, in Leinster, the Nemedians are totally defeated, and there, Arthur, the youngest son of Nemed is slain. The aged Nemed dies of a broken heart after this great disaster, and dying, is buried on the top of the great island which overlooks Queenstown harbour, and which, for many centuries, was known as the Island-Height of Nemed.

Now the Fomorians, under two fierce monarchs, More and Coning, subdue and enslave the children of Nemed, plundering and taxing unmercifully. From Tory* Island, their sea-defended stronghold, they issue forth to lay waste and harass. Finally, the enslaved gods rise against their oppressors, led by six brave captains, and assault the very centre of their power in the north, but in vain. They are slain by the Fomorian giants or overwhelmed in the waves. Of the Nemedian chiefs three only escape, who in ships, with their crews, flee out of the island, leaving their Fomorian foes masters of the island.

Of these, Briotan the Bald seeks Britain, and becomes the progenitor of the British gods. Semeon Brac escapes to the east of Europe. From him sprang the Fir-bolgs. Ibath also flies in the same direction, and becomes the

* The name means the Isle of Towers, i.e., cairns. It was evidently the seat of the worship of those gods who appear in the bardic literature as Fomorians. Many cairns, pillar stones, and cromlechs are still there.

ancestor of the classic gods of ancient Ireland. The Tuatha De Danān, last and final development of the Irish mythology, the deities worshipped by the Irish when the Christian missionaries landed, and of the fairy princes and weird invisible men and women of the mediæval romantic literature and fairy lore. Henceforward all the supernatural races have their origin traced back for them to Nemed, who, in our mythology, is the *stirps deorum et demonum*.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIR-BOLGS.

AFTER many generations the descendants of that Semeon Brac,* who had escaped from that slaughter by the Fomorians at Tory island, return into Erin as the Fir-bolgs, though certain nations amongst them also bore the name of Fir-domnan and Fir-Gailean.

Their captains are five immense warriors, sons of Dela, Slaney, Rury, Gann, Genann and Sengan. They, too, are harassed by the Fomorians; but the wars assume no large distinctive epic forms.

I incline to the belief that before the formation of the Milesian legend, the Irish bards carried back to this branch of the divine family the pedigrees of the aristocracy; but that the monks and christianized

* This is a *bonâ fide* Irish mythological personage. The name is not Biblical. Let the reader remember that, however voluminous and minute he may think this history, it is really but a sketch. Every person named had, and most of them have, their histories, being as they are the protagonists of cycles, many of which remain,

bards having adopted the Milesian theory, the Fir-bolgic fell into disrepute.

That the bards looked back with regret and admiration upon this extinguished race, is evident from the character assigned in the annals to Eocha mac Erc, their last monarch. "Good were the days of the sovereignty of Mac Erc. There was no wet or tempestuous weather in Erin, nor was there any unfruitful year."* The reader will remember that the age of mere heroes commences with the Milesian invasion, and that all the preceding ages belong to weird supernatural peoples of various orders and kinds, the gods and semi-divine giants of the ages of pure fable. In the more classical and received literature, the Fir-bolgs do not exhibit those unearthly attributes which characterize Fomorians and Tuatha De Danān. They are merely immense men of ancient times whom the gods subdued, and exterminated or exiled. Before the formation of the annals, and while the traditions were being moulded into an artistic form by the plastic genius of the bards and the national imagination, of which they were the organ, the Fir-bolg race gradually lost those weird attributes which the other mythological races retained. They figure as huge champions of vulnerable flesh overthrown and ruined by the mightier unearthly race of the Tuatha De Danān, now treading close upon their heels. Yet, that they were once intimately and vitally associated with the supernatural and were regarded, at least in

* In the *Odyssey* there is a passage in which reference is made to the belief that in the reign of a good king the weather is milder and the earth more fruitful. The same is recorded of Conairy Mor, Rex Hiberniæ, Part viii., chap. 2.

certain localities, in the light of gods, is evident from a closer inspection of the existing literature, and from a contemplation of their position in the order of the traditions. They are descendants of Nemed, who is also the ancestor of the Tuatha De Danān. They are the sons of Dela, a name which appears in the pedigree of the Tuatha De Danān and also amongst the Fomorians, while one of the very few passages in Irish literature which refers to the direct invocation and worship of gods, concerns this same Eocha mac Erc, last king of Fir-bolga.

PART V.

Classic gods of Ethnic Ireland.

CHAPTER I.

INVASION OF THE TUATHA DE DANĀN—FIRST BATTLE OF MOY TURA.*

Now, from abroad returned into Erin the multitude of the descendants of Ibath who, to supernatural stature and strength, added unearthly and demonic powers, landing on the Wicklow coast, and as a pledge of their resolution, burning their fleet upon the shore. They enveloped themselves in black clouds, concealing their host from the eyes of the inhabitants. Westward then they marched "or on the ground or in mid air sublime," so swathed in darkness, till they reached the Iron Mountain on the confines of Leitrim.

Here they encamped. The clouds peeled away, and the Fir-bolgs assembled on the plain westward beheld the glittering ranks of their destined conquerors—the enchantment-wielding host of the younger gods.

* The scene of this mythical battle was Moy Tura, which means the plain of Towers, i.e., Cairns. In spite of centuries of neglect and devastation, the plain is still filled with sepulchral monuments. It was in fact one of the great burying places of the ancient Irish, who, from honouring with periodical rites their ancestors there interred, gradually came to worship them as gods. When the younger gods overcame the elder, this plain of Moy Tura was regarded as the site of a great battle in which the former, the Fir-bolgs, were defeated and annihilated.

Six days the great conflict lasted with heroic feats, described at length with minuteness and enthusiasm by the bards. On the third day, Nuada, king of the Tuatha De Danān, has his arm cut off. The cure of a god was easy as in the Iliad. Diancect, the physician, makes for him one of silver, and his son caused it to possess vital power like the arm of a man.* On the sixth day the good Fir-bolg monarch, heated and exhausted in battle, seeks water to quench his thirst. The gods, however, by their weird power dried up all the streams and lakes. The Fir-bolg flees northward till he reaches the border of the ocean, where he is overtaken and slain by three sons of Nemed of the Tuatha De Danān, who are themselves slain by the retinue of Eocha. The tomb of the last king of Fir-bolgs is still seen by the margin of the sea, and is surrounded by the water at flood-tide. Those of his slayers, smaller in size, are still in the neighbourhood.†

Eventually, with the slaughter of one hundred thousand men, the Fir-bolg host is utterly overthrown. Those who do not flee out of the country tender submission to their terrible conquerors, and the Tuatha De Danān enter into the sovereignty of the island, ruling it with a semi-mundane sway until their own defeat at the hands of the sons of Milesius, when they cover themselves with the Fæd Fia and retire into invisibility.

* The gods slain in each battle are miraculously revived during the night, and the arms shattered are made whole. Even in the heat of battle these miraculous craftsmen of the Tuatha De Danān fashion spears with lightning speed. See O'Curry's "Manners and Customs," vol. 2.

† Ballysadare, Co. Sligo.

In the Milesian and historic ages, the bards contemplated as then co-existing in and around Erin, four great races, viz.,—1st, The Milesians, dominant, all-powerful, heroic, the war-like aristocracy of the island. 2nd, The Fir-bolgs, enslaved in parts and in parts free and martial, but always more or less acquiescent in the authority of the Milesian nobles. 3rd, The Tuatha De Danān concealed by the Fæd Fia, but actual and real, pursuing in the mountains and raths their magic labours. 4th, The Fomorians, also actual and real, but more remote, these two last races constituting the Irish gods.

CHAPTER II.

THE TUATHA DE DANĀN.

THIS strange race deserves more than cursory treatment. The very name, like the people, is mysterious, scholars being yet divided as to its signification. In their wanderings over Europe,* after having been driven out of Erin by the Fomorians, they acquired such skill in druidism, i.e., the art of necromancy and magic, that they have raised themselves above nature, and assume and exercise the attributes of gods. Their ambrosia, the flesh of swine slain from the enchanted herd of Mananān the sea-god, has made them immortal. The same god, too, has given them

* This fancy is scholastic. We see traces of an attempt to connect the Irish with the Greek gods. They are represented as living near Athens, and there doing strange deeds, reviving the dead, &c. Also, there are traces of an attempt to connect them with the Scandinavian gods. — See Keatinge.

the Fæd Fia, which renders them invisible. Having eaten the food prepared for them by Goibneen the Smith, they have become invulnerable to weapons. They can restore the dead to life. They travel on the pure cold blast* of the wind, passing unnoticed through the midst of assemblies. By their magic art they transform† themselves into animals, fishes, or birds, resuming again their human appearances. They wield strange power‡ over the elements, and raise storms at sea. They alter the appearances of things, deluding men's senses. They surround themselves with clouds§ and mist when they would converse with mortals. They dwell mysteriously in the raths and mounds, in the folds of sacred mountains, in the depths of the sea, or in some far off and mystic land, variously named the land of the Ever-young, the land of Bliss, or of Promise, in fact, the heaven of our ethnic ancestors. Their stature is superhuman and their beauty. Their weapons have magic properties.|| Everything recorded of this race is weird and mysterious.

* *E. g.* Angus Óg, travelling to the relief of Diarmid and Grany.—See Diarmid and Grane, Pub. Oss. Soc.

† Cian, father of Lu the Long-handed, transforms himself into a swine to escape the wrath of the sons of Quirenn; Fintann, into a salmon; the Mór Reega, into a crow. The Olympian deities are, by the Greek mythologists, endowed with similar powers.

‡ See first battle of Moy Tura—the drying up of the rivers; also, *post*, Part vii., chap. 4, the storms they raise to drive the Milesians from the coast of Ireland; also, that feat of the Dagda Mór, who repelled the sea from the county of Louth.

§ From time to time, a hero is enveloped in mist, and separated from his companions. Having thus isolated him, the god appears, and tenders advice or warning.

|| *E. g.* The spear of Lu, which was alive, and itself flew with a savage instinct when discharged against the foe. Also, there was the caldron of the Dagda, which never failed to produce food, no matter how great the assembly might be.

Lest any should imagine that the Tuatha De Danān are to be confounded, as to stature and dignity, with the mere fairies of mediæval superstition, let this picture of the Dagda Mōr, their king, be remembered :—

“A wheeled* eight-pronged warlike fork after him, (*i.e.*, the Dagda,) so that the track behind him would suffice for the mearing of a territory.”

Again, Cuculain is incomparably the greatest of all the heroes who figure in the fore front of Irish history, yet, once, when he is overpowered, contending in single combat with the champions of an opposing army, Lu, his supernatural father, comes down and repels the whole host, keeping them at bay until his son revives.

If it were necessary I could give many examples proving the dignity and gigantic power and strength of the Tuatha De Danān. In the Bruidin Da Derga, one of them, Mac Cecht, crouched sitting in the gloom, is likened to a mountain.†

Yet, undoubtedly, the fairies of mediæval times are the same potent deities, but shorn of their power and reduced in stature. But, even in this fairy lore, the Tuatha De Danān are rather above than below human stature. The name fairy, such are its associations in the modern mind, is hardly a correct translation of Far-Shee, or Ban-Shee, it suggesting something diminutive, or airy and unsubstantial. The Sluagh-Shee of our native fairy lore, are definite substantial men and women, though invisible and immortal.

* This seems to be a great spear, driven like a battering-ram on wheels.—
“Manners and Customs,” Vol. i., p. 611.

† Part viii., chap. 3.

It can be easily gathered from the foregoing description that we are not dealing with men in this race of the Tuatha De Danān, or even with heroes, but with a people having some of the essential attributes of gods. The second word—De—in their triple-formed name, means certainly “gods.” What, however, has hitherto caused men to hesitate in directly ascribing to them the character of divinities, is the fact, that in the bardic literature, so far as my reading has gone, we find few* allusions to prayer directed towards them, or worship, or sacrifice. This is very strange, for so superhuman and metaphysical is their character, that we can with

* Cuculain calls to him or invokes his class of power, i.e., his tutelary gods, when he stoops to lift up Briorind’s palace. See Part ix., chap. 3.

The following ancient verse indicates that Mac Erc, the last king of Firbolga, was actually prayed to :—

“ During the Trēna of Tailteen
I twice invoked Mac Erc,
The three plagues to remove
From Erin, though it be a woman’s command.”

The Trēna of Tailteen means the three days’ festival or solemn assembly. Tailteen was the wife of Mac Erc. In her honour this assembly was first held.

It would seem, from the following, that Mac Erc was the god of treaties and the sanctity of compacts :—

“ Their hostages were brought forth,
The drowning of the bonds of the violated treaties,
Immolating the sons of Æd Slaney,
To Mac Erc it was a cause of shame.”

The sacrifice of beasts and men, as practised at Tailteen, is referred to in the following passage :—

“ The three forbidden bloods,
Patrick preached therein,
Yoke-oxen and slaying of milch cows,
Also, by him, the burning of the first-born.”

For the foregoing, see “Manners and Customs,” Vol. i., p. 612. In this context, I may remind the reader of that passage in St Fiesh’s hymn : “The peoples of Erin used to worship the Shee.”

difficulty imagine a people believing in them, and yet not regarding them as the objects of prayer and worship.

This anomaly, I think, must be explained by the fact that the existing bardic literature, though it relates almost exclusively to pre-Christian characters, yet underwent its final redaction in Christian times, *i.e.*, in an age when the gods had ceased to be regarded as an object of worship. As Christianity spread over the island, the Tuatha De Danān, shorn of their more religious attributes, were yet so much a part of the imaginative and intellectual life of the Gael, that they could not be exorcised. They still filled the imagination and interpenetrated the whole mental fabric of the age. Thus, in the existing literature, they do not appear exactly as divinities, but as a potent, weird, mysterious race, of superhuman size and beauty, and deathless and invulnerable.

That they were the pagan divinities of Ireland no one who studies their appearances in the literature can doubt, but there is also positive testimony to that effect.

St. Fiech, in his metrical life of St. Patrick, writes of the pre-Christian Irish: "The peoples of Erin used to worship the Shee,"* the Shee and the Tuatha De Danān being convertible terms.

In Cormac's Glossary, the writer speaks of Ana as the mother of the Irish gods, *mater Deorum† Hibernensium*, Ana, being also Dana,‡ or the Mōr Reega,

* See Miss Cusack's "Life of St. Patrick," p. 561. For the antiquity of this poem, see p. 9, same work.

† The portion of Cormac's glossary, edited by Mr. Stokes.

‡ Query, is Dana compounded of *Da Ana*—the goddess *Ana*—and can this word be connected with *Diana*, the mother of the classic gods, *i.e.*, *Cybelé*, the *μεγάλη μήτηρ*, or mighty mother.

the great Tuatha De Danān—queen and enchantress.

Again, the three sons of Tuirenn and of the above-mentioned Ana, Brian, Iuchar, and Iucharba, are distinctly spoken of as gods,* in a metrical portion of an ancient tale; and Bauv, Macha and Mōr Reega, as goddesses, by Keatinge,† quoting from the ancient work called the Book of Invasions.

It is a matter of the greatest regret that one of those learned monks of the sixth or seventh centuries, such as Adamnan, did not leave a philosophical account of the whole ethnic system of Ireland. This, not having been done, we are left to the comparatively unsatisfactory testimony of the bardic literature.

As we have lost the more ancient bardic literature of Greece, we cannot tell how Musæus and his brethren accounted for the superhuman attributes of their gods, but, it is probable, that the Olympians arrived at deity by the same means as our own Tuatha De Danān, viz., by magic. Traces of this subsist in the Caduceus of Hermes and in the Cestus of Aphrodyté. The Irish gods effect all their great work by spells, incantations, and the use of the druidic wand. It is therefore, probable, that an idea so fundamental, holding such an influence over the mind of one branch of the Aryan race, affected all equally in the same stage of civilization.

The Irish druids, like the Gaulish described by Cæsar, may have been, and, probably, were originally

* New Atlantis, "Sons of Tuirenn." I say, designedly, the metrical portion, for such are always the oldest parts of the tales. All the tales were first written in verse; so were the laws, genealogies, histories, &c.

† See his account of the Tuatha De Danān.

priests, *i.e.*, men who assumed to be closer to the Tuatha De Danān than the rest, able to placate them or to direct their hostility ; but, in the existing literature, the druids are magicians and nothing more. There are, however, allusions to the Tuatha De Danān, as being themselves druids, or wielders of magic power. This belief in sorcery and enchantment must have been common over Europe in early times, for, Cæsar writes that the Gauls used to travel into Britain to learn its secrets. We may, therefore, presume, that druidism, in the sense of a belief in enchantments, spells, &c., prevailed widely over the north-west of Europe, before and after the Incarnation ; and we find it in Irish mythical literature, as the source and cause of the power and immortality of the gods. We may, therefore, conclude, that in the pre-Homeric days it played the same part in the Greek branch of the great Aryan family.*

The life-giving food of the Greek gods, was ambrosia,† an article not described by the poets. The ambrosia of the Irish gods was plain pork, or ham, but procured by the slaughter of enchanted swine, the property of Mananān mac Lir. We may be sure, that in the simpler and more archaic stages of the development of Greek mythology, ambrosia was described with some plainness of speech, and had, probably, nothing more mysterious than the food eaten by the Irish gods at their "feast of age."

* Cæsar's description of the Gaulish druids shows, that the name applied to the whole intellectual class of the country, including priests, magicians, poets, historians, and lawyers. In the Irish literature the druids are the magicians only.

† New Atlantis, Vol. iii., Notes to Children of Lir.

CHAPTER III.

CHIEF PERSONÆ OF THE TUATHA DE DANĀN GODS.

THE supreme monarch of the Irish gods was the Dagda Mōr, or Mighty Father, whose temple was the great Rath of New Grange, on the Boyne, a work which, even now, excites astonishment. It covers at least an acre of ground, being of proportionate height. The earth is confined by a compact stone wall about twelve feet high. The central chamber, made of huge uncut rocks, is about twenty feet high, with four smaller chambers branching off, the whole communicating with the outer air by a low passage made of flag-stones. The door of this passage is a smooth slab, adorned with carved circles. Within, in the central chamber, there is a sort of carved stone dish, on which, probably, offerings or incense were burned. It is recorded in the annals, that when the Danes were devastating that territory, they penetrated into this and other mounds in the neighbourhood, and took away the treasures. Had the ethnic civilization of Ireland been suffered to develop according to its own genius, I believe that the central chamber of this and the other great pagan mounds, would have, in the course of time, proved the rudiment and germ of spacious stone temples. As it is, they were the rudiments of the bee-hive* shaped houses of the monks, and of the round towers which were their successors, and primitive churches.

* The bee-hive houses were built in ethnic times also. Thus, within the great stone enclosures on the isle of Arran, there are several such. Doubt-

In the first battle of Moy Tura, this god is represented as laying waste whole divisions of the Fir-bolg army. In another tale, we see him crossing a plain, gigantic in size, and trailing behind him a spear, whose track in the ground ploughs a trench* deep enough to be the mearing of a territory. The Dagda is a musician, as well as a warrior, king, and necromancer. But, like everything owned by this race, his harp has magical properties. It is instinct with a living spirit, and floats through the air obedient to his call. Once, the Dagda and Lu Lam-fáda† penetrated into the country of the Fomorian gods, and entered their assembly. When the Fomorians challenge him to exhibit his musical skill, he uttered a druidic incantation to his harp. It came at his bidding, and passed through the assembly, slaying nine Fomorians on the way.‡

The tendency to attribute life to inanimate things is apparent in the Homeric literature, but exercises a very great influence in the mythology of this country. The living, fiery spear of Lu, the magic ship of Mananān, the sword of Conairy Mōr, which sang, Cuculain's sword, which spoke, the Lia Fail, Stone of Destiny, which roared for joy beneath the feet of

less, the cinerary urns were repositied in them.—See Miss Stokes' Work on Irish Architecture. Those great stone enclosures, such as the Staigne Fort, in Kerry, Ailech Neid, in Innishowen, &c., were certainly religious edifices, and not fortresses. They have, in the bardic literature, exactly the same significance as the mounds and raths, and are associated chiefly with the gods. Ailech Neid means the stone house of Ned, and Ned is the primitive war-god.

* "Manners and Customs," Vol. i., p. 611.

† For this god, see Part v., chap. 4.

‡ "Manners and Customs," Vol. iii., p. 214.

rightful kings, the waves of the ocean, roaring with rage and sorrow, when such kings are in jeopardy, the waters of the Avon Dia, holding back for fear at the mighty duel between Cuculain and Far-dia, are but a few out of many examples.

I may here, too, remark on the tendency to impute a human nature to irrational animals, *e.g.*, the two bulls of the Tān-bo-Cooalney epic, which were once druids—of them, one, the Donn Cooalney, the Bull of Ulster, delighted in the recitation of tales, and to see armed youths play at martial exercises before him—the Liath Macha, the grey war-steed of Cuculain, who foresaw the hero's death, and shed tears of blood—the hound of Finn mac Cool, Bran, with her preternatural sagacity, and the white hound* of Lu Lam-fáda, of whom there was a weird druidic history, only a part of which I have been able to discover.

We read of the Dagda's great love for his son, Angus Ūg the Beautiful. Angus saw in a vision, a lovely maiden, for whom he pined and wasted away. The Dagda, sorrowing, searched all over Ireland for her, forcing the great southern genius, Bove Derg, to join him in the quest. Eventually, she was discovered in the west of Ireland.† He himself loved a beautiful Fomorian maiden. The mythologists had no more pity for him than the early Greek bards seem to have had for Zeus. They make no scruple to laugh at some

* This hound changed rivers, across which he swam, into wine, was once a yew tree, and is described as more terrible than the sun upon his fiery wheels.

† This was the age of Cuculain. Thus, the formulated annals are corrected by the bardic literature; for, in the annals, the Dagda is set down as having reigned and died a thousand years before.

of the events of his wooing. The malicious laughter-loving Fomorians, give him a certain food, which distends his belly to most unromantic proportions. In this unheroic form he suddenly meets the beautiful maiden.* The Fomorian gods grin broadly around.

His brother, Bove Derg, genius of the Galtee mountains, King of the Fir-Shee races of the south of Ireland, was second to him in power and dignity. His goldsmith, Len, gave their ancient name to the Lakes of Killarney, once known as Locha Lein, the Lakes of Len "of the many hammers." Here, by the lake, he wrought, surrounded by rainbows and showers of fiery dew.†

Bove Derg's swine-herd is a strange character. Every feast to which he comes ends in blood. There is a significance in this personage which I cannot explain. He seems to have been at least a haruspex, for he is represented in one place as slaying a pig, and prophesying from an inspection of the entrails. But there is something deeper than this in his personality.

In early Roman mythology the pig seems to have been sacred to the god of battles.

Lu Lam-fáda—Lu the Long-Handed, hero of the second battle of Moy Tura, for whose history, see chap. 4, in this Part. He first taught men to ride on horses. Architecture‡ and other arts were ascribed to him.

* "Manners and Customs," Vol. i., p. 157.

† "Ibid., Vol. iii., p. 203.

‡ There is a poem giving the history of the Gobban Sær, mythical builder of the Round Towers, which ascribes to Lu the source of his skill, commencing thus: "When Lu went out from Tara." It refers to the dispersion of the ethnic deities.

Thus, he is called the Ioldāna, or source of all the sciences. A hound, white as snow, accompanies him, around whom the night lightens, and the rivers which he swims runs with wine, "more terrible than the sun upon his fiery wheels." This mysterious hound, the bard simply states, was once a yew tree, flourishing three hundred years in the forests of Ioraway.

Angus Ōg, or the Young, genius of youth, beauty, and love, was the most beautiful and amiable of the gods, Eros of the Gæl. He inspired love, and was the patron god of lovers. From his own kisses he created weird birds of desire, at whose singing love arose in the hearts of youths and maidens. They are known as Eoin Beg Bailé, the Birds of Little Good.*

The great Rath of New Grange, on the Boyne, also sacred to his father, was believed, too, to have been the palace or temple of Angus. A company of warriors once encamped on its lawn, but a tall youth came out from the mound, and bade them leave. They refused, and that night Angus slew their horses.

In the Ossianic cycle he is frequently mentioned. Twice he is represented as entertaining Finn and his mighty men in his enchanted palace on the Boyne.

Cormac mac Art, Rex Hiberniæ, 226 A.D., disbelieved in his existence, but the god appeared† to him in the gloaming, in his own chamber, at Tara, a tall beautiful youth, with golden hair. He carried a tiompan, or lyre of gold, in his hands, and chanted a prophetic hymn.

* O'Curry Manuscript Materials, p. 479. "O Angus, the sweetness of thy kisses."—*Lament of Fionála*. New Atlantis.

† "Manners and Customs," Vol. iii., p. 262.

Diarmid,* the Launcelot of the Ossianic cycle, was his foster son. Angus watched over him daily through his career, and when he was slain, restored him to life so far that he could share with him the mysterious existence of the Tuatha De Danān. The allusions to him are very frequent in the later literature, which, being more romantic and chivalrous than the elder, naturally reverts to this most amiable and beautiful of the gods.

Midir the Proud, brother of Angus. He is represented as coming in mortal wise to the palace of Eocha Airem, Rex Hiberniæ, B.C. 23, and winning from him his wife, as the wager in a game of chess. He subsequently bore her away to his own enchanted dwelling.†

Lir appears in two distinct forms. In the first, he is a vast impersonal presence, commensurate with the sea, in fact, the Greek Oceanus. In the second, he is a separate person, dwelling invisible on Slieve Fuad.‡ His first wife was the daughter of Bove Derg, of the Galtees; by her he had four children, three boys and a girl. On her death, he married again, but the step-mother, incensed at the great love which he bore to his children,§ transformed them into swans while they bathed in the Lake Derryvara, in Meath. Here, for three hundred years, they dwelt, chanting and prophesying both for the Tuatha De Danān and the Milesians. Afterwards, they roamed the Moyle for three hundred

* Part x., chap. 4.

† See Part vii., chap. 2.

‡ A celebrated mountain, Co. Armagh, near Newtown Hamilton. On this mountain Cuoulain captured his great war steed, the Liath Macha.

§ Lir is represented as sleeping nightly with his children. For the tale, see *New Atlantis*. Also, *Joyce's Irish Romances*.

years, and, finally, the seas on the west of Ireland. Their sufferings and woes seem to have been, at one time, a favourite theme of tragic poetry.

Mananān, the Son of Lir. He was the most spiritual and remote of all the mysterious race. We never read of him as engaging in wars, but as educating youth, giving advice, bringing to his weird palace favourite kings and heroes, to teach them wisdom, and forging magic weapons for their use. He cast Cuculain* out of fairy-land, the hero having made love to his wife, but afterwards had pity upon him, when he beheld him distraught and mourning, and poured such oblivion over his mind, that his unfaithfulness to his own wife Emer, and his love for the goddess Faun, his sojourning in the enchanted land, his expulsion thence, and his suffering in the wilderness of Mid-Luhara, all seemed to him as a vision.

When mariners, overpowered by stress of wind and sea, gave all up in despair, and prepared themselves to die, a strange man appeared amongst them and took command of the ship, inspiring confidence and exertion, until the storm was overpast. This was Mananān, son of Lir, the good Far-Shee, "Genius of the Stormy Headlands."

Mananān had a magic ship, the Ocean-sweeper, which, without oar or sail, crossed the sea swiftly, obeying the desire of the pilot; and a steed, Cēnbar,† on which he rode across the wet waves of the sea as on dry land. When Cuculain routed the host of

* New Atlantis.—*Sick Bed of Cuculain.*

† In Norse mythology celebrated heroes perform their achievements on the horse of Odin. So Mananān lends his weird steed to favourite heroes.

Meave, at the battle of Gaura, it was his wand waved above him that transfigured the hero and his war-horses, so that Terror and Panic went out before him.

Di-an-cecht, god the healer, was the physician of the race. When Nuada the Silver-handed lost his arm, at the battle of Moy Tura the First, Di-an-cecht made for him one of silver, which his son filled with nerves, muscle, and blood, so that it was equal to one of flesh.

Di-an-cecht's medical lore was not of the sort termed positive. It consisted in druidic spells, waving of magic wands, &c. It is remarkable, that even to the present day, the druidic healer, termed fairy-doctor, is extensively patronized by the Irish peasantry.

Fintann, the Salmon-god, was a survival of the earliest of the divine races, that of Ceasair. He was the god of poetry and history, preserving in men's minds the memory of past events. The legends concerning him mingle with Christian and Scholastic ideas. His speciality of history causes his frequent appearances in the literature of mediæval book-loving Ireland.*

Ned was the genius of war ; an impalpable presence, rather than a person. The circular stone temple of Ailech Neid, was named from him, *i.e.*, the Stone house of Ned. His wives, Fea and Nemon,† are mentioned, and he fills a place in the genealogies. The pedigrees of the Fomorians, defeated at Moy Tura, and of the contemporary Tuatha De Danān, meet in

* See Part iv., chaps. 3 and 4.

† Queen Meave alludes to her as the genius of Slaughter.—See "Manners and Customs," Vol. iii., p. 429.

him. He gave his daughters, three Furies of carnage, to Conairy Mōr,* as pledges that he would not disturb the realm with war during his reign.

The Mōr Reega, or Great Queen, fills a place equal to or greater than that of the Dagda Mōr. Her other name was Dana or Da Ana, the goddess Ana. The Pap mountains, in Kerry, once bore her name, being in Gælic, the Two Paps of Dana. The whole race of the gods are supposed to have been called from her, viz., Tuatha De Danān, the Divine People of Dana.

Though powerful in war, and contributing much to the defeat of the giant Fir-bolgs at Moy Tura, her character is too great to have been specialized for mere martial purposes. She seems, too, to have been the genius of wealth and fertility. The author of Cormac's Glossary, calls her *Mater deorum Hibernensium*—Mother of the Irish gods—to which the scholiast added: "Well she used to nourish the gods." We find her frequently alluded to in connection with cattle. Twice she is seen milking cows, once driving the Fion-banah† out of Murthemney, when she is met and accosted by Cuculain;‡ and, again, speaking to the Donn Cooalney, the great black bull§ of the North, and warning him of the approach of the foe.||

She appeared to Cuculain in the form of a beautiful peasant girl, proffering love, which he refused. In

* See Part vii., chap. 3.

† This was one of the two weird bulls of the Tan-bo-Cooalney.

‡ On this occasion she made love to Cuculain, who answered, that he had nobler work to do than dallying with women. For this, the Mōr Reega persecuted him during a great part of his career.

§ See Part viii., chap. 2.

|| A masterly account of this goddess is given by Mr. Hennessy in the *Revue Celtique*.

consequence, she persecuted him in the wars of the Tán-bo-Coolney, but Cuculain defeated and wounded her. Afterwards they were reconciled, and she became his guardian deity. Before his last battle she passes through Emain Macha by night, and breaks the pole of his chariot as a warning. She was present at his death in the form of a grey-necked crow.*

Macha was another of the De Danān goddesses, but more peculiarly identified with war. Her first appearance was as the wife of Nemed. In this context she is connected with Emain Macha, but it is to her second avatar, as wife of Kimbay, that the foundation of that city by her is more classically described.—See Part vi., chap. 6.

On the banks of the Boyne, one of the great raths was sacred to her magic steed, Liath Macha, the grey war-horse of Macha, the immortal terrible steed of Cuculain. This was one of his homes, whence he went forth to his various grazing grounds. It was by the lake Liath, on Slieve Fuad, that Cuculain seized† him. The Hero and the Weird Steed then encircled Ireland in titanic gyrations and strugglings, until Cuculain subdued and tamed him. On the morning of the death of Cuculain, tears of blood fell from the eyes of the Liath Macha, and when the hero was overthrown, the Liath Macha three times encircled him, trampling

* On another occasion, she stands in the midst of the camp of Queen Meave, and shouts so, that the host rushes together in panic, and three hundred warriors are slain. Warring with Cuculain, she transforms herself into a water-serpent, also into a water-weed, seeking to clasp his legs and disable him. We can imagine the greatness of the bardic conception of Cuculain, when he is made the conqueror of this terrible being.

† The capture of the weird steed is described in the ancient tale called "the Feast of Brierind."

down the host of Meave. After that, he returned to his mound on the Boyne, and entered into it, still wearing on his neck the broken yoke, a symbol of his service with the Hero.*

In the same age, we find Macha living as the wife of a favourite hero, concealing her divinity. Her husband, at the great fair of Tailteen, boasted of her swiftness, and the Ultonians, in consequence, compelled her to race against the steeds of Concobbar, though she was then pregnant. She outstripped the horses, but died at the goal, leaving a curset on the Ultonians, her own people, which they dearly rued.

Creidé was the god of gold-smiths. The Brehon laws, on this art, bore his name, and were ascribed to him. His magic palace was beneath the sea, where he was drowned while bringing gold out of Spain.

Ainey was a southern goddess, and the patron of the Heberian races. Her house and temple was the Hill of Ainé, a conical mound, close by the Church of Knock Ainey, Co. Limerick. She does not, to my knowledge, fill a very important place in the bardic literature, but is remarkable for this, that the peasantry of Limerick and Tipperary still believe that she haunts this spot; a tall beautiful woman, dwelling unseen in that ancient mound, with her son, the weird Earl of Desmond.†

* He is also represented as announcing to Emer the death of her husband, appearing before her after the battle, and putting his head into her lap.—See "Great Breach of Murthemney," R. I. A.

† This curse was, that they should be liable to periodical fits of debility as great as that of a woman in child-birth. While suffering from one of these fits of debility, they were invaded by Queen Meave of Connaught, commanding the collected armies of the four remaining provinces of Erin. It was then that Cuculain stood out alone in defence of Ulster.—See "M.S. Materials," p. 586.

‡ It is strange, however, that all the Royal Houses of Munster traced

It would be tedious to enumerate and describe the innumerable members of this divine race, whose hold upon the imagination of our ancestors, even after they had ceased to be objects of direct religious adoration, was so great, and who give a tone so deep and weird to the literature. This, however, is observable, that, at least, in the later literature, a peculiar gracefulness and elegance belongs to the Tuatha De Danān. They are not cruel or fierce, but, in spite of their invisible, and, therefore, irresponsible power, amiable, kind, and beautiful. If we regard the Heroes as the type of a perfect aristocracy in its martial phases, then the Tuatha De Danān would seem to be the most perfect type, so far as the Ossianic bards could imagine it, of an aristocracy, non-militant, bright, kind, and wise.

CHAPTER IV.

SECOND BATTLE OF MOY TURA.

THE Tuatha De Danān now enter into the sovereignty of the island. This was, so to speak, the bardic age of gold when the gods dwelt visibly in the land, ruling as princes over such of the Fir-bolgs as did not fly out of the island. But the ancient troublers of the isle are at hand. The weird race of the Fomorians who

descent from her. Aileal Oliúim, King of Munster, ravished the goddess, and from this rape sprang the ruling families of the south of Ireland. For modern traditions concerning her, see David Fitzgerald's valuable article in the *Revue Celtique*, Vol. iv.

Through mediæval ages, Ainey was regarded as the tutelary fairy, or Banshee of the Munster aristocracy.

had waged war with Partholān and driven the common ancestors of the Fir-bolgs and Tuatha De Danān out of Ireland, now reappear. Out of their weird realm they descend upon Erin; and after a great war—the theme of many most interesting antique tales—succeed in reducing the gods to the direst slavery. All hope was taken away, for the Fomorian monarch, with Gorgonian eye, can convert armies into stones.* The Tuatha De Danān sink down into hopeless slavery. The Fomorians do not even live in the land they oppress. From some far off region their insolent tax-gatherers annually appear, and sweep away all the produce of the island.

In this gloom there appears, to break their bonds and destroy for ever the power of the oppressor, one of the noblest figures in all mythical literature. Balor, the gigantic monarch of the Fomoroh, has a daughter named Ethleen, who married one of the princes of the De Danān race named Cian, the slender, son of Di-an-Cecht, the Æsculapius of the Tuatha De Danān. Their son Lu, the Long-Handed, was, while yet a boy, taken out of Erin and educated at the court of the most spiritual and remote of the De Danān gods, Mananān, the son of Lir. On reaching

* Compare the gorgon-faced shield of Pallas Athené. I strongly incline to the belief that this notion of Balor, having been able to convert armies into stones, was derived from the physical characteristics of his supposed tomb or temple. The plain around was strewn with pillar-stones marking minor graves. Thus the fancy that he of the giant tumulus had petrified an opposing army would easily arise. I believe the physical features of the great cemeteries, the character of each tumulus, its position with reference to the adjoining mountains, rivers, &c., and its relative position to the other mounds, have been a chief influence in determining many of the legends to their present form.

man's estate, the choice is presented to him of ruling over his own people as a member of the dominant Fomorian nation, or of allying himself with the enslaved and trampled De Danāns. To many at all times in all nations that choice has been given, and the hero's alternative often accepted, viz., by Moses in Hebrew history, by Gaudama in Indian, by the Gracchi at Rome ; nor is the character unknown in the modern history of the nation whose progenitors worshipped the Ioldāna.*

Lu cast in his lot with his father's people—dispirited, enslaved, paying servile taxes, unarmed ; for the Fomorians, like all tyrants, had taken away their weapons and made captive their smiths. Thus, Lu in Irish tradition stands out as the genius of patriotism and heroic loyalty to the cause of the down-trodden.

Out of the mystic region where dwelt his foster-father, the great Far-Shee, Mananān, Lu appeared in Erin riding on the magic steed Cēnbarr, which crossed as on dry land the fluid billows of the sea, clad in impenetrable armour, the gift of his foster-father, girt with the mountain sundering sword of Mananān, having the brightness and the sweep of the rain-bow, and bearing in his right hand a sling. With him came his foster-brethren, the pupils of Mananān, who loved him. Thus, like an incarnation of hope, courage and beauty, he came back to his country now peopled by trembling slaves—his own degraded kinsmen. The gods seeing him afar believed that it was the rising of a sun, such glory surrounded the fosterling of Mananān.

* One of Lu's surnames.

Simultaneously appeared the tribute-collectors of the Fomoroh demanding the yearly tax, whom Lu, to the amazement and terror of the gods, attacked and slaughtered. The remnant fled out of the isle.

Lu now addresses himself to the more formidable task of arousing the free spirit of his degraded kinsmen, and, finally, led them, now armed, to meet a Fomorian army at Iorrus in the west, whom he utterly defeated; but suffered the remnant to depart on condition that they should return with the whole Fomorian nation and fight one decisive battle for the sovereignty of Ireland.

Like all the greater Irish heroes, a passionate affectionateness marks this god. His foster-mother, Tailtiu, widow of Eocha mac Erc, last king of Firbolgs, had died, and was interred in Meath at a place called from her Tailteen. In her honour he instituted great games, enjoining that they should be repeated every third year. These games were celebrated far into the historical and mediæval ages, being in the heroic under the control of the Red Branch. It was here that Macha perished in the chariot-race, contending against the steeds of Concobar. To his father Cian, he was also passionately attached.

Lu and his comrades now return to Mananān; Lu being plunged in grief at not having seen his dear father Cian, who could no where be found. Riding through the plains of Murthemney,* however, as they passed an ancient cairn they heard a dolorous voice issuing out of its depths. Lu recognised the voice of his father, and in a passion of grief desired to know

* The modern county of Louth.

what was this calamity which had overtaken him. Then the voice of his father answered out of the tomb, and said that he there had been murdered by three brothers, princes of the De Danān race, Brian, Iuchar, and Iucharba, the three sons of Tuirenn. Edged weapons were powerless to slay him, being a god, so they had stoned him with ragged rocks. Nine times they sought to bury the body, and nine times the earth indignant had cast it forth ; but the tenth time they piled above him a mighty cairn, and so had departed to Iorrus to fight with the Fomorians.

Then the voice implored vengeance ; and Lu declared before all his people and in the hearing of his murdered sire, that to the end of the world no vengeance like his would ever be inflicted in the whole earth, and no such retribution ever exacted.

Afterwards at an assembly of the Tuatha De Danān, he by a stratagem, caused his kinsmen to impose upon the brothers as an eric-fine, the collection of the most valuable and strictly guarded treasures of the whole earth.

Weeping, and attended by their sister to the sea, the brothers depart upon the mighty quest. Thenceforward, the interest settles on the brothers, a strange pathos investing their wanderings, sufferings and wars, their fidelity and fraternal love ; but amid all their woes and adventures the reader never forgets, seen as it were afar off, the implacable countenance of the avenging Lu.*

* A considerable portion of the epic history of Lu is to be found in the New Atlantis. The tale in its present form is mediæval ; but is evidently a classicized form of a notable portion of the ethnic mythology. It is probable that in ethnic times these brothers were represented as eternally enslaved by

Returning to Erin, Brian first catches sight of his native land, and in his arms lifts up his dying brothers that they too may behold it ere they die.

To return.—At length the whole Fomorian nation, headed by Balor and his Amazonian wife Kethlenn,* come down into Erin; but in the great battle of Moy Tura,† the Fomorians are utterly annihilated by the unconquerable Lu. Balor, sleepy with age, was with difficulty brought into the battle. Nine giants with hooks lifted like a portcullis the vast lid of his petrifying eye. At the first glance whole ranks of the Tuatha De Danān were converted into stones. Ere it could be opened again, he was slain by Lu, who dashed a ball from his sling through the giant's brain. After that, with his magic spear, he slew Kethlenn and routed the whole Fomorian host. The Fomorian heroine, however, succeeded in wounding the great Dagda‡ in the battle. Lu was that god who was represented as the source of all the arts, corresponding somewhat to the Greek Apollo. To him the bards attributed the supernatural paternity of Cuculain the great champion of the heroic ages.

Lu, and working his will all over the world, he being typical of light, art, patriotism, and surnamed the Ioldana or the Inventor, and they the hands with which he worked. They brought from abroad to their master, that living demonic spear to which reference has been made, a magic boar-skin which healed the dying by its touch, and a wonderful white hound, terrible as the sun upon his fiery wheels.

* Enniskillen took its name from this goddess, i.e., Inis Kethlenn, the Island of Kethlenn.

† Barony of Tirrerrill, Co. Sligo.

‡ According to the annalists, the Dagda retired to his house, i.e., temple, the Brugh on the Boyne, and there died; but this is not so, he lived.

CHAPTER V.

TREATMENT OF THE TUATHA DE DANĀN BY MONKISH WRITERS.

So firm was the hold which the ethnic gods of Ireland had taken upon the imagination and spiritual sensibilities of our ancestors, that even the monks and christianized bards never thought of denying them. They doubtless forbade the people to worship them, but to root out the belief in their existence, was so impossible, that they could not even dispossess their own minds of the conviction that the gods were real supernatural beings. Deny them they could not, they were too real, too present and actual, for scepticism. The existence of these weird inhabitants of the isle, they could no more doubt than that of their neighbours, whom they beheld with the eye.

The Literature teems with reference to the invisible people of the island, often representing them as much reduced from their former power, but always as real existences, dwelling in the raths and mountains. Fully convinced, then, of their reality, the only question was as to their origin. Three theories evidently held varying sway over the minds of the mediæval historiographers. The first was scholastic, according to which the Irish gods came out of Greece. This theory, however, was not held with sufficient earnestness, to permit any development of a mythus, clearly deducing them from the Olympian gods, or identifying the Irish with the Hellenic*

* In the time of Cæsar, the identification of the Gaulish with the Roman and Hellenic deities was complete. It is strange, however, that the Gauls represented as the Greek Heracles, a god named Ogmius, famed for eloquence

gods. According to the second theory, they were the accursed children of the wicked Cain ; and, according to the third, the ill angels, driven out of heaven by Michael the Archangel.

The Miltonic identification of the Semitic gods with the fallen angels, sprang from the same psychical source as that of the third theory of the Irish Christian bards and historians.

There were, however, two other theories, one of which lasts to the present day, that of the philosophical. Tihernah,* who ignored their existence altogether, and commenced his history of Ireland at a point far down in the Milesian record, and that of later but not wiser historians, who treat the pre-Milesian races as actual historic races and dynasties. This theory, the most absurd of all, is held at the present day in the following form :—" It is certain that various races, from time to time, swept over Ireland, Basque, Celtic, Norse, or Teutonic. In the Book of Invasions, in which is preserved a general account of the peoples who preceded the Milesian, we have a glimmering history of these successive waves of migration and occupation." With this notion in his mind, it is plain that an ardent inquirer may lose the labour of a life-time in its application, therefore, in the strongest manner, I desire to warn

and learning. The name seems connected with the Hiberno-Celtic "ogham," the cryptic characters of the bards and druids.

* Tihernah commences his history of Ireland at the date 299 B.C., thus eliding not only all the Fir-Shee races, but an immense number of traditional monarchs of all Erin. I dare say, there is not in European history such an instance of the early development of the critical faculty. Vergilius, the mediæval denier of the doctrine that the sun moved round the earth, was also an Irishman.

all theorists against entertaining it even for a moment. When we reflect on the play of imagination necessary to convert a mundane king or warrior into a hero, the perversions of fact and chronology necessary to bring about the grouping of many heroes of diverse ages and places into a single cycle, and to interconnect them by close relationships and friendships, &c., and then regard the further immense step by which the heroes become gods, we cannot but be aware that all trustworthy fact must be eliminated in this process.

The genuine bardic theory is that which is of importance to us. According to this, the gods were immense and powerful heroes of eld, who raised themselves above nature by druidic skill.

PART VI.

Natural Mythology of the Irish.

CHAPTER I.

ABSENCE OF A WORLD-MYTHUS.

IN the fine mythology of the Edda, it is related how the Norse gods, having slain the giant Ymir, fashioned the world out of his body. From his vast skull they made the solid concave firmament. With his blood they filled the hollows of the earth, and called the rolling mass, Ocean. His flesh became the earth, and his bones the rocky foundations of the earth, the stones and mountain-ridges, and of his brains they made the fluid and shifting clouds.

Probably, none but children ever believed this myth in the literal sense of the words, but, to mental restlessness, the wild imagination afforded a certain repose. In the present age, though we know rather more than our ancestors, our knowledge is a burthen to us ; no large satisfying world-theory has yet embraced the results of science, and the mind remains dissatisfied and ill-at-rest in the midst of its possessions.

The world-mythus of the Greeks was different. Chaos gives birth to Earth and Heaven, and these produce the early gods. In the Norse, the gods make Nature ; in the latter, Nature makes the gods.

In the great Semitic parable, the spirit of God descends upon Chaos, harmonizes its discordant elements, and creates the world.

That the Ethnic Irish had, at one time, their own world-mythus, is more than probable. The strong, vivid, and all-pervasive imagination, which produced the bardic history of Ireland, must have framed its own theory of the formation of the heavens and the earth. The intellectual development, which, when fired by Christianity, produced results which rendered the island conspicuous for centuries, could hardly have been arrived at without creating on its way some imaginative answer to the great question of origins. Here, in Ireland, too, the old Sphynx sat by the roadside and interrogated the wayfarer.

Unfortunately, the Irish bardic literature has come down to us, having had its last redaction in Christian times and under the influence of Christian ideas. The successive passage of centuries, like waves, over that literature, obliterated nearly all that was offensive to Christian conceptions of the origin of things. At all events, of the existence of such a world-mythus, no trace now remains. The Irish gods have hardly more dignity than the Homeric. They possess, indeed, supernatural power and superhuman stature and beauty; but, in the still extant literature, they do not appear as having created the world, or as governing the operations of nature, though they at times exercise over it an uncertain and capricious power.

CHAPTER II.

LAKE AND RIVER MYTHS.

Now, while the religion, and, probably, the greater features of the Irish mythology, have been lost, and, while the imagination, that doubtless, at one time, embraced earth and heaven, has left behind little or no trace of its existence,* we still retain, appearing at many points in the literature, a smaller, but quaint and curious mythology, relating to the formation of various physical features of the island itself. Ireland, as it presented itself to the imagination of the bards who formed our history, was originally an island covered with forests, without lakes or rivers, and wooded from the centre to the shore. What theory was once held as to the formation of the island itself, we may not now learn. It was a god who repelled the sea from that plain, which now forms the county

* The large Kosmic character of the Scandinavian mythology arises from the fact that it continued, down to the middle ages, always developing and improving. Irish mythology received a deadly check as early as the fourth century. That even any of it should survive is wonderful. In the literature we see indications that the druidic organization took to themselves the credit of causing the operations of nature to go on regularly and without check. In the particular instance to which I refer, they are represented as maintaining that it is owing to them the sun rises each morning and sets each night.

That a cabalistic body, with esoteric mysterious rites should put forth such a claim is perfectly natural, and also that they should believe it to be well founded. That spring in human nature, whence starts sacerdotalism, is, doubtless, one of the oldest and deepest.

Those who contrast the vastness and sublimity of the Norse with the comparative smallness of the Irish mythology, must remember that the former went in developing itself during centuries which were extinguishing the latter.

of Louth ; whence, we may conjecture, that in the ancient mythology, some similar myth embraced the whole island. Such a feat was not beyond the power of the Irish divinities, even as they appear in the extant literature.

The Irish bards did not represent their gods as possessing divine attributes in their own right, but as having attained their power through means of magic and enchantment. The early Christian writers alluded to Magi, or Druids, who, in the literature, never appear as priests, but as magicians. The gods of the bardic literature were simply ancient heroes, seen through ennobling mists of imagination and fancy, and who, to superhuman size and strength, united a magic power, which rendered them superior to the laws of nature. Thus, behind the gods there existed in nature a source of power, whence, by their necromantic skill, the gods drew their divine attributes. It was to this source that the bards referred the origin of their lakes and rivers. The bardic origin of the Shannon supplies a good example.

In ancient* times there existed, at the source of the Shannon, a mysterious fountain called Connla's well. On the margin of this well there grew a hazel-tree, bearing nuts of bright crimson, which would endow with all knowledge those who might eat of them. An ancient fear, however, invested the well, forbidding intrusion. At length, a goddess, Sinān, a daughter† of Lir, yielding to the promptings of curiosity, drew

* "Manners and Customs," Vol. ii., p. 144.

† Lir corresponds to Oceanus in Greek mythology. It is noteworthy, too, that, according to the Greeks, the rivers were daughters of Oceanus.

nigh, intending to pluck and eat the fruit, but the fountain rose against her, pouring forth an angry flood, which swept her down to the sea. Ever after, the waters of Western Erin flowed in the channel thus formed, and the river received the name of the too curious goddess, Sinān, since varied into Shannon. Spenser writes the name, Shenane :—

“The stately Shenane spreading like a sea.”

The origin of the Boyne is similar—the goddess Boanna, or Boan, being in this case the desecrator of the sacred well. Along with the goddess, her lap-dog was also swept down to the sea, and there changed into the rock, which from him was named Cnoc Dabil, at the estuary of the Boyne. To those who personified the Boyne, the fancy that this rock was the Boyne’s lap-dog would easily suggest itself.

It was also added that those wells still exist, though undiscoverable, and that at the time of the shedding of fruit, a salmon, the Eo Feasa, or Salmon of Knowledge, appears there, and as each nut drops into the water, he darts up and devours it. The properties of the enchanted fruit were communicated to the fish ; whoever might catch and eat him would know all things.

This legendary hazel-tree, with its wisdom-giving nuts, is often alluded to in the literature. A mediæval poet, Cormac, Bishop-King of Cashel, says : “ I found my nut of knowledge on the Barrow,” implying merely that he was educated on the shores of that stream.

Sinān and Boanna were the water nymphs of their respective streams. The latter was wife of one of the Tuatha De Danān gods, Nuada the Silver-handed.

The river was also known as "the arm of the wife of Nuada," pure and bright as Boan's arm.

A somewhat similar origin is given for some lakes. The origin of Lough Neagh is thus told: Eocha, a southern hero, starting from Slieve Phelim in Tipperary, travelled northwards till he reached the Boyne, where he and his people encamped before the Brugh* of Angus, the Dedanan god. Angus, enraged at the desecration of his sanctuary, slew their horses that night. Passing thence northwards, he encamped on the Plain of the Grey Copse, when a magic well sprang up. Eocha built a house over the well, giving the key to one of his women, with injunctions never to leave the door open. The woman neglected the command, and a flood broke forth which submerged Eocha and his people, forming the great lake, which from him was called Loch n' Eocha, or Lough Neagh. Eocha was, doubtless,† the god or genius of this lake.

The more common mode of representing the breaking forth of rivers and lakes is, that at the burial of him or her whose name it happened to bear, the water burst forth. The Drowis, in Connaught, burst forth at the burial of Covac‡ Coel Bray; Lough Ennel, once Lough Anind, at the burial of Anind. The hero, or heroine, so connected with the lake or river, became its genius or water-sprite.

* This was the great mound-temple of New Grange, sacred to Angus, son of the Dagda.

† See Joyce's *Celtic Romances*, p. 97. The divine character of Liban, his daughter, proves that of the father. It is said that Liban was converted by the Christians. This fancy often appears in connection with De Danān personages.

‡ Part vi., chap. 7.

The legend concerning the Drowis was known to Spenser :—

“Sad Drowis, which once his people over-ran.”

Usually, the water-genius is represented as having been drowned in the water which he haunted.*

Sometimes lakes and rivers are represented as having burst forth for joy. On the night of the birth of Conn of the Hundred Fights, three lakes and rivers brake forth, and remained to be a perpetual adornment of Inis Fail. This, however, is but an example of mythological decorations surrounding a historic king.

Spenser, in his own beautiful way, blending the Greek mythology with the physical features of his adopted country, and incorporating, perhaps, some now lost legend, makes the Suir, Nore, and Barrow three brothers, sons of the giant Blomius† and the nymph Rheusa.

The myth of Arethusa, *i.e.*, the conversion of a living person into a stream, has some parallels in Irish mythology. The great goddess, the Mōr Reega, enraged with an inferior, struck her with a magic wand, and converted her into the Lake Odras.‡

The following curious account of a lake god is given in the tale called the Feast of Bricrind. The right to the champion's seat of Ulster was contested between Cuculain and other Knights of the Red Branch. They referred the arbitrament to Uath of Lough Uath. The

* Thus, Creidé, the smith-god, was drowned while bringing gold into Ireland from Spain. In other words, his magic chamber was beneath the sea.

† The Slieve Bloom mountains. They took their name from an ancient god or hero, Bladhma, who appears in several cycles.

‡ See Mr. Hennessy's paper on the war goddess, *Revue Celtique*.

god rose out of the lake, bearing a brazen adze in his hand, and decided in favour of Cuculain.*

The genii of the waters are not always human or divine beings. Lough Liath, in Slieve Fuad, was inhabited by the great war-horse of the hero Cuculain. There, by the margin of the lake, the hero first seized him. Thither he retired after he was slain. This was the Liath Macha, the weird steed of Cuculain. He had also a stable, so to speak, one of the great mounds on the Boyne.

In the external world there is nothing so beautiful or attractive as water, with its endless and infinite varieties of mood and shape—its suggestions of abounding life, its mingled beauty and mystery. All the poets have exulted in this element. Stream-loving Flaccus found in the splash and ripple of the prone rivulet, a type of his sweetly-laughing, sweetly-talking Lalagé; Wordsworth's more serious genius found itself best reflected in broad still lakes. Indeed, I doubt if there has been any poet who has not left some significant allusion to lake or river. That the streams and lakes of Erin, its most remarkable natural feature, should have deeply touched the minds of the Irish bards, and should have played an important part in the mythology, is most fitting and to be expected.

The mythological literature of all nations teem with references to this element, being, as it is, the most perfect emblem of the human soul, and reflecting its

* Uath invited each hero to present to him his neck to be cut through with his adze. The others refused, but Cuculain joyfully consented. Three times the god lowered his adze upon the neck of the hero, weeping the while, then bade him arise Champion of Ulster. He was then a boy.

infinite varieties of mood, whence the imagination naturally attributes to it life.

“How the waters dance and sing, surely they are alive.”

But, in times when the imagination is completely unfettered by reason, the sentiment of life, suggested by lake and river, instead of being diffused throughout its extent, is centred in a living person mysteriously dwelling in its depths. Our ancestors believed that such a weird personage resided in every lake and river, and the legends to which I have alluded, gradually grew into form in answer to the query—how did these persons first come to reside there? Sometimes, doubtless, the name of the river, a name indicating merely its general character and appearance, was afterwards attached to its imaginary tutelary genius, and a legend framed relating his or her history. More generally, the lake or river god was some ancient hero interred beside the river, and whose mound was conspicuous upon its shore. Sometimes, the water-genius dwelt in an adjoining hill. The genius of Loch Liath once wronged Finn mac Cool. In Titanic rage his warriors rent the adjoining hill, and unearthed the god from his magic palace in its heart.*

Modern poets personify lake or river in a vague, semi-incredulous manner. Some go still further, adopting, for a moment, certain rural superstitions, and imagine the genius of the water but rather as a spirit, apparition, or water-wraith than anything more substantial. The Irish lake and river gods were real men,

* Pub. Oss. Soc.

though having supernatural attributes. Were the Fæd Fia removed, they could be seen distinctly, eaten with, fought with, touched, like mortals. Uath, of Lough Uath, walks out of his lake to the call of the Red Branch champions, with his brazen adze in his hand, as real as a man, and addresses the heroes. Cuculain finds the Liath Macha grazing on the shores of his enchanted lake, seizes him by the mane, struggles with, tames, and compels him to draw his war chariot. The great epic contest between Cuculain and Far-Dia* was really, and, in its original, a strife with the god of the Avon Dia. The river refuses to flow in horror at the mighty duel, and leaves its channel dry, while its god contends with the great northern champion.

I incline to think that the strife between Achilles and the river gods, indicates the late origin of that portion of the Iliad. In the primal imagination, the gods would not have been so vague and elemental. They would have risen in armour out of the waters, and resisted the hero.

The most valuable of the Irish heroic literature may be distinguished into three great divisions:—the first, that which relates directly to the wars and adventures of the gods; the second, the great Ultonian cycle revolving round Cuculain and his contemporaries (*tempore Christi*); the third, the Ossianic, referring to Finn mac Cool and the Fianna Eireen heroes of the third century A.D. The latter and the former, to a certain extent, exhibit some mediæval features. In the second, the æsthetic view

* Far Dia = the Hero of the Dia. Cuculain stood out in defence of Ulster against the host of Meave. Part ix., chap 1.

of nature hardly appears ; but the others reveal something modern in their feeling towards the beauty and mystery of natural* objects. In the second the attention is directed to the genii who inhabit the lakes and rivers ; in others the divine suggestions are diffused through the water itself. For example, Finn mac Cool, according to Ossian, delighted to slumber by the great cataract of Assaroe, to listen to the breakers thundering against Iorrus, and the washing of water against the sides of ships.† A wizard‡ of the supernatural Fomorian race put the following query to Finn :—

“ I saw to the south a bright-faced Queen
With couch of crystal and robe of green,
Whose numerous offspring sprightly and small,
Plain through her skin you can see them all.”

Finn explains that the bright-faced Queen is the river Boyne ; her couch of crystal the shining floor of the stream ; her green robe its glassy borders ; and her offspring seen through the translucent skin the salmon and trout swimming below.

This pretty thought could not have appeared in the elder literature, and is too ingenious and light-hearted for modern. It is one of those conceits or cleverisms in which primitive peoples delight.

Ireland is so rich in beautiful streams and lakes, it seems but natural and fitting that in the bardic history of Ireland, their imagined origin should have

* There is, however, much antique literature relating to the gods ; but most of that which we now possess has been subjected to some enervating process.

† Compare with this the grand Homeric description of the waves breaking around the ship of Ulysses.

‡ See Joyce's "Celtic Romances."

been closely and circumstantially related. When the whole of that literature is collected and examined, it will be found that Ireland does not contain a single river or lake of any importance concerning which the imagination of our ancestors did not evolve some pretty or quaint story. Even certain parts of rivers have their legend incorporated into the national epos. Thus, nearly all the fords have their mythical history. For example, the little stream in the County of Cork, flowing from Lough Crut,* westward, to join the Ilan, was forded at a spot called the Ford of the Ash Tree, *Augh-na-Finshon*. Just below the ford was a deep, dark pool, the Witch's Pool. This sprite was the genius of the stream. She pursued Owen Mōrt† southwards, when he fled before the wrath of Conn; but was slain here by the southern king. From her ashen goad grew the ash-tree which gave its name to the ford. The local imagination created the water-witch which the bards and historians gradually nationalized and incorporated in the history of the island.

It is plain, that the men who composed the bardic history of Ireland, loved its lakes and streams, knew them well, and thought much concerning them. Indeed, these men were acquainted with the physical character of the country in a way in which Irishmen never again will be. From *Dún* to *Dún*, from Cemetery to Cemetery, *loci* as they were of the great festive assemblies, they travelled on foot or horseback, noting every physical characteristic of the island—their

* The name remains on the townland in the parish of Drimoleague, Co. Cork; but the Lake has disappeared.

† See Part x., chap. 5.

knowledge not being merely æsthetic, but mingling vitally with what they believed to be the history of the island. Every spot had its tutelary genius, a being powerful, immortal and invisible dwelling there, or was connected with some remarkable event in the history of some well-known monarch or hero.

It is certainly not to the credit of modern Ireland that the only poet whose imagination was touched by the wonderful beauty of our rivers, was the Englishman, Spenser.

Some streams had magical properties. Thus, when Fingin, the weird physician of Slieve Fuad, was summoned to heal Cuculain after his battles at the Avon Dia, he caused him to drink water drawn from various streams, all enumerated.

The legend of the fountain of youth was, of course, common in Ireland as in all countries whose mythology has been preserved.

The Castalian well of our mythology was on Slieve Gullian. Thither Finn approached once; but the goddesses who guarded it, arose, and in their helplessness and confusion, dashed from the palms of their hands the water of the well against him. From what fell upon his lips the hero acquired the gift of prescience.*

The swans of some lakes seem to have been sacred. The legend of the transformed childrent of Lir seems to have taken its origin from this circumstance.

* As will be seen there is another legendary account of how he came by his prophetic skill. See Part xi., chap. 2.

† See Part v., chap. 2.

CHAPTER III.

MYTHS OF FOREST, MOUNTAIN, AND ROCK.

THE creation of rivers and lakes forms a considerable portion of the early mythical history of Ireland. Their fluid volatile masses, which may be swollen and may disappear utterly or withdraw, gloom or glitter, rave or be still, would naturally seem to the imagination more susceptible of the operation of external and supernatural influences than the more solid features of the island. With regard to these, the beneficent action of the early gods is confined to the felling of forests and the clearing of plains. The Nemeditans especially figure in this industry. The hill of Tara was once forest, till cleared by a god, Caen,* whence its first name Droum Caen. The mountains seem to have suggested too much strength, and to belong too clearly to the eternal order of things, to be capable of any such plastic or formative treatment. The gods, indeed, dwelt upon them or within them, but they were not raised by the gods. The only superhuman action of the Greek gods,† in connection with the physical features of the mountains, seems to be that of Hercules, who tunnelled the mountains of Arcadia into subterranean channels for rivers, by which to draw off the floods which Apollo indignant had caused to overflow the highland plains of that country.

* See Petrie's *Essay on Antiquities of Tara*.—R.I.A.

† They did not even create Olympus, their dwelling place, but merely expelled out of it the dragon who formerly possessed it.

There are, however, in Irish mythology, some slight traces of such a treatment worth mentioning.

Fergus* mac Roy, unsheathing, after a long deprivation, the great sword which had been fashioned for him by Mananān the sea-god, wheels it round his head in exultation. In its horizon-sweeping circuit he shears away the tops of three mountains, hurling them into the plains of Meath. These severed mountain crests were known as "the three bald hills of Meath."†

Through the centre of Ireland, running east and west, there extends a long gravel ridge, known in the bardic literature as the Esker Riada, whose origin the geologists refer to the action of the sea when Ireland was submerged. To our wonder-loving ancestors this was the great rampart erected by Conn of the Hundred Fights and Owen Mōr, the southern monarch, when, on the cessation of their second war, they agreed to divide the sovereignty of Ireland by a partition line drawn from Ath-a-Cliah Dub-Linn to Ath-a-Cliah Mara, i.e., from Dublin to Galway.‡

Conspicuous rocks would naturally be more susceptible of such treatment. In Greek mythology, a great pebble fixed between the clefts of Parnassus, was pointed out as the stone presented by Rhea to Kronos, when he wished to devour the infant Zeus. In Irish mythology, the great stones standing near the ford of Athlone, were smitten from the nearest mountain side

* See Part ix., chap. 3.

† Carn Twohill, Co. Kerry, would mean the Tomb or Tumulus of that personage. I am not acquainted with the legend.

‡ For this war, see Part x., chap. 5.

by Cuculain, with his sword, and set up there as a memorial of the defeat of Queen Meave and the Olnemacta.

A huge stone, by the mouth of the Boyne, near Drogheda, had been used by one of the giants of Queen Meave's host, in sounding the estuary of the river, during the same war, and then cast by him into its present position.

On the Kenmare river stands a group of rocks, substituted by the goddess Edair for Owen Mōr and his warriors, when Goll mac Morna and his Connaught champions laid waste the southern army.

The pillar stones, which mark so many ethnic tombs in the country, being evidently artificial, would, of course, easily lend themselves to imaginative treatment.* At Tara, on the rath called the Rath of the Synods, stands a tall round stone, once famous as the Lia Fail, or stone of destiny, which has given to Ireland one of its many names. It was removed to its present position to mark the grave of rebels slain there in '98, from a rath further south named Rath Lægairey. Two ancient fables affect to give the history of this stone; according to the first, it was brought by the gods into Erin; according to the second, by the Milesians from Asia into Spain, and thence, by Heber and Heremon, into Ireland.†

* Moreover, in this case the legend would generally be semi-historic. The stone marked a grave, and the name of the hero would naturally cling around it.

† See Part vii., chap. 4.

CHAPTER IV.

MYTHS OF THE SEA.

It is natural to suppose that in minds so tender and imaginative, and so susceptible to all impressions, as were those in which the bardic history of Ireland shaped itself, the sea should form a considerable source of legend and poetry. In Homer, the sea seems an object of fear and dislike,—the fishy sea, the winedark sea, and other allusions, seem to indicate this, and the motion and sound of waves around the bark of Ulysses, returning from the sacrifice to Apollo, exhibits an equally sombre feeling concerning this element. In the Iliad and the Odyssey, this element was not regarded as in a happy or sympathetic relation with man.

The tone of the bardic literature of Ireland is quite different. One of the noblest thoughts, having reference to the sea, is seen in the oft-recurring notion that it sympathized with and was aware of the dangers surrounding the greater heroes of the isle. In such moments, then, at three diverse points, the ocean roars a note of warning and sorrow. In the war between Concobar mac Nessa and the returned exiles, the great sons of Usna, Fiechra, son of Concobar, wearing his father's weapons, was hard pressed by Illan the Fair, son of Fergus. Then, Concobar's shield, Ocean, roared, and the three chief waves of Erin roared in reply, the wave of Cleena, the wave of Rury, and the wave of Toth. Then was Conaill Carna at Dún Sovarchy, and he heard the wave of Toth. "True it is," said Conaill, "Concobar is in danger, and it is not right for me to remain listening." Conaill

arose after this, and took his arms and armour and crossed Ulster, and came on to where was Concobar in Emain of Macha, and he found the fight upon the lawn, and Fiechra, son of Concobar, greatly exhausted by Illan the Fair.*

How striking is the difference between primæval poetry and modern may be seen from a comparison between such passages and the following, in which Shelley represents the elements as mourning for Adonais, expressing, too, a kindred thought, viz., the sympathy of Nature with the fortunes of men :—

“Pale Ocean in unquiet slumber lay,
And the wild winds flew round sobbing in their dismay.”

On this side, modern poetry is mere fancy ; ancient poetry is strong undoubting belief.

The sentiment which evinces itself in the modern song, “What are the wild waves saying ?” is also expressed in a beautiful antique tale of the Ultonian period.

Neidey,† son of Adna, wanders by the sea shore of Alba, “for it is by the sea that poets are wont to compose their lays,” and listening to the noise of the waves, he addresses to them magic verses, to compel them to translate for him the inarticulate sounds which they utter. Then the sea-spirits inform him that his father has died, and that a stranger is

* Publications of Gaelic Society, p. 89. See, too, Part ix., chap. 2. The Gaelic spelling of the Shield's name is *Eo-quinn*, i.e., the Hound's Brooch. In the heroic ages the Brooch was large and round. It is compared to the moon, and also to a chariot-wheel, thus indicating, not only the great size of the brooch in early times, but the gigantic conceptions generally entertained concerning the heroes.

† This was in the time of Concobar mac Nessa and Cuculain.

assuming the robe and office of the chief bard of Ulster.

The interpretation of the noise of the waves is elsewhere described as one of the functions of the druids. As Owen Mōr draws nigh to Spain, the king and his chief men and druids feast by night in the royal palace. They hear the billows roaring strangely along the shore. Then prophesied Dadróna the Druid :—

“ I hear the waves clamour along the shore,
The sound is an omen—the harbinger of a King.”*

These waves more properly roared for the High King of all Ireland. They are represented as welcoming Conn of the Hundred Battles, when he marched against Owen Mōr.

“ He who was there was a precious stone, a sheltering tree, a transparent gem, a cluster of vines; for his march was the rush of a spring-tide, and his journeying the evacuation of territories, and both the sea and land rejoiced in his greatness. And the Monarch was certainly and evidently greeted by the three swelling waves of Fohla, the wave of Toth, and the wave of Rury, and the long, slow, white, foaming wave of Cleena.”†

Toth and Cleena were goddesses. Rury, as we have seen, was a god of the Partholanian cycle, but appears perpetually in all the divine cycles ; also, as a Milesian monarch 112 B.C., when he becomes the founder of the Red Branch of Ulster. The wave of Toth was the mouth of the River Bann ; of Cleena, the Bay of

* Battle of Moy Lenna, p. 41. Part ix., chap. 5.

† Battle of Moy Leena, p. 95.

Glandore, Co. Cork ; of Rury,* the Bay of Dundrum, Co. Down.

The full flow of the spring tide was often employed as a metaphor. Thus is described the King Conairy† Mōr :—

“ I saw a tall illustrious prince
Start forth against that bright ground,
Full flowing in the spring tide of dazzling beauty,
Of expression gentle, but proportions bold.”‡

* This Rury must be identified with the founder of the Clanna Rury.

† See Part vii., chap. 3.

‡ “Manners and Customs,” Vol. iii., p. 143.

PART VII:

Pre-Historic Kings of Ireland, being chief persons of Ancient Heroic Cycles.

CHAPTER I.

OF IRISH UNITY.

THERE is a pleasure in watching the reclamation of desert land—the choking moisture drained away, the sour peat mingled with sand, the stones collected into heaps, the making of roads and the building of fences, and, in the end, the sight of corn-fields where the snipe shrieked, and herds of kine where the morass quaked.

There is a pleasure in watching the dispersion of darkness before the rising sun, the gloom changing slowly into the silver twilight, the twilight ripening gradually into the golden day.

There is a pleasure in watching with the scientist the subsidence of some vast and horrible chaos into a shape of celestial beauty, fulfilling its part in some sidereal system, rolling through space around its sun clear and determinate, a world and a star.

But there is a pleasure deeper, more human and sublime, felt by one who contemplates out of the seething welter of warring tribes, the slow growth of a noble people, the reclamation of a vast human wilder-

ness, seeing how the stormful gloom of ignorance grows less and less dense, shot through by the rays of knowledge, imagination, and love, how the chaos of confusion and aimless strugglings concentrates gradually into the wise and determined action of a nation fulfilling its part in the great national confraternity of the world.

But for the historian of Ireland no such delightful task is reserved ; not for him to trace the track of the many springs and rivulets, to mark how they converge, and, uniting, form the strong undivided current of the history of a nation moving forward between its firm shores, freighted with the destiny of a single people accomplishing its fate ; not for him to limn the slow glorious growth of a nation among the nations of the earth. Beginnings, ever beginnings ; noble actions without end, that shine and vanish, characters as great as any, but resultless, movements full of hope leading no whither, flashing glories ever dimmed and blasted, travail and labour unceasing, expectation and resolution ever baffled ; through all the centuries, Ireland, as in birth-pangs with many cries, labouring to bring forth the Irish nation, and that nation still unborn. "*Tantæ molis erat Romanam condere gentem.*"

Yet, too, how much has been gained, what public crimes and sins avoided, by a birth postponed into a time when, however dimly, the true ideal of nations is beginning to be understood, and their rights and duties to be prescribed.

No nation has suffered wrong through Ireland, none can attribute to her any portion of his woes. Moreover, the very idea of a nation is yet chaotic and inchoate. An aggregation of individuals ever struggling

against one another for mere existence, and legalized anarchy, the highest conception of law and order, does not constitute a nation in any true sense of the word. What man of imagination can with real unalloyed pleasure write the history of any nation such as nations have up to the present been, aware, as he must be, of the wail of slaves and the downtrodden piercing always through the ostensible sounds, the black depths of fraud and wrong, and futile wrath and bitterness below the glittering surfaces of even the most cherished phases of the history of the greatest nations.

I have said that the Irish never achieved a vital and stable political unity, for those tumultuary movements* of the race in the fourth century, which, at the same time, accelerated while they were produced by the failing strength of contiguous Rome, cannot be regarded as indications of real unity, but of an unity ephemeral and fortuitous, produced under peculiar circumstances, and destined to decline.

But, that such was, from the remotest times, the ideal of the race, and the goal towards which the genius of the land ever impelled the country forward, is evident from the whole tenor of the bardic literature. Imaginative conceptions, though invariably wrought upon the past, are painted with hues fetched from the future. In individuals, hope is a stronger spring of life than memory, and it is the same with nations. Nations as well as individuals live even more in the future than in the past. One of the most striking

* Niall Mór of the Nine Hostages, in this age, seems to have been really what he is called by monkish historians, *Imperator Scotorum*. See Parts xii. and xiii.

features of the bardic literature is this dominant conception of the Irish race, as forming a single homogeneous nation, owing allegiance to a single sovereign, and governed by edicts issuing from one centre of rightful authority, namely, Tara. In spite of the spectacle perpetually presented to the eyes of the bards, of an island ever convulsed with the struggles of warlike and hostile tribes, the past, at all events, the remote past, always reveals to them a single nation ruled by one legitimate king. Thus, Ceasair, Partholán, Eocha mac Erc, King of Fir-bolgs, and the Dagda Mór, are ever represented as ruling over the whole island. Thus, too, what was certainly contrary to the fact, the early history, including the long roll of Milesian kings, has ever regard to Ireland as a whole. The main current of tradition and bardic narrative does not break into various and diverging channels, but runs in one strong undivided stream.

Yet, certainly, at some remote time, the bardic records were not national, but local, though perpetually tending in the direction of nationality. Every district in the island had its topical gods and heroes, and its local traditions embodying what was believed to have been their character and achievements. What held these traditions together, and rendered them enduring and famous, was the periodical games and fairs held on the spot where those ancient heroes were interred. Over the inurned dust and bones of the hero his people raised a great mound, and instituted recurring games. There were held the public assemblies of the tribe for purposes of war or peace. Thither naturally came the merchant and all who had goods to dispose of, and, thither, too, the bards and story-tellers. Other worthies

of that small realm were interred there too, and, by degrees, was formed one of those cemeteries, those strange groups of raths, mounds, pillars, and cromlechs, which supply the key to immense volume of semi-historic bardic tradition. As intercourse increased between the various nations and septs, and as the bards passed to and fro, from assembly to assembly, the topical hero became of provincial, if not national importance. No bard, not stationary and attached to a single tribe, would obviously be qualified to exercise his profession without an acquaintance with the accepted history of the gods and heroes honoured in the localities which he visited. Now, though the kings and warlike tribes regarded strife and conquest as the chief end of existence, the bardic class was, to a considerable extent, relieved from martial duties. To engage in war was ever unbecoming to a bard, though acquaintance with the bardic art was held honourable in a warrior. Thus, the bards of ancient Ireland were enabled to form themselves into a fraternity—a great national guild. Cæsar records this of the Gaulish druids, and the fact is equally patent in the history of Ireland.

It is, therefore, easy to conceive under such conditions a local hero of more than ordinary fame, arising sometimes from the celebrity of the assemblies held around his mound and sometimes from the prowess and conquests of the tribes who held him in honour—growing to the dimensions of a national hero; though his achievements may have been local, yet, their recital would have become or have tended to become national. I believe that the chief heroes of all the more important cemeteries, or groups of mounds, were

well known amongst the bards of the island as a confraternity. Unconsciously then and unceasingly in the homogeneous bardic mind ever tending towards the conception of a single and uniform national existence, these fell naturally and in the course of centuries, into their places, as dominant successive monarchs of Ireland. Others not so important and famous, became, for obvious reasons, kings of provinces and territories ; and others, chief warriors, druids or bards, attendant on such kings. All the celebrated local traditions of the island were swept into the treasure-house of bardic memory, and in process of centuries under the stress of such influences as I have described, fell into that order which we find in the annals and which needed a period of some two thousand years for regular chronological arrangement. Such is the genesis of this astonishing bardic history of Ireland. The great topical heroes have not been set down as contemporaneous within the limits of a few centuries preceding the historic period, but as successive monarchs of Ireland. Not but that the bardic account does not, to a certain extent, preserve the true fact as to various successive classes of heroes. For instance the heroes worshipped as Fir-bolga, preceded those known as Tuatha De Danān, being as they were, ancient deities overpowered by younger rivals, as the Greek gods dethroned the Titans. Again, those heroes who, through their remoteness and the mass of ancient legendary fame surrounding them, ascended to a divine character and were known as Tuatha De Danān, preceded those who were known as mere warriors or monarchs ; and the Knights of the Red Branch appearing in the dawn of history,

and in the first century of our epoch, were certainly more ancient than the Ossianic heroes who fill the third century—an age in which the fundamental assertions of our annals and chronicles are certainly correct.

CHAPTER II.

GENESIS OF THE MILESIAN AND GADELIAN LEGEND.

I MUST, at this point, anticipate somewhat the development of the traditional history. The Tuatha De Danān people, *i.e.*, the gods, held for a while sovereign sway over Erin, living visibly in the island, ruling over the Fir-bolgs and other remnants of ancient races. But the term of their wizard power was near its end. Out of Spain, the Espan of the bards, came in ships the sons of Milesius with their host, who waged war upon the gods and drove them, not out of the island, but out of sight; the gods henceforward becoming not indeed less real, but invisible.

Before the time of Milesius, the race of which he was king were named the Gadeliens or Clanna Gadel, *i.e.*, the posterity of Gadel,* a remote ancestor of the race. It is in the history of these Gadeliens, and here alone, that we find evidences of a wholesale interference by the monks and Christianized bards

* Gadel is but a form of Gædil. The people whom foreigners named Scoti and Hiberni, called themselves the Clanna Gædil, *i.e.*, the Gael. It is, therefore, possible that some remote god or hero bore this name, though it does not mingle in the regular ethnic traditions. He may, indeed, have been a mere creature of mediæval imagination; though this is not so probable.

Milesius (*Gaelice*, Gollam),* a Spanish prince,

Billé,

Brögan, ancestor of the Corca Lewy of the heroic ages
and the O'Driscolls of history,

Bratha,

Alloid,

Nugat,

son of

Neniul,

son of

Fæbar Glas,

son of

Heber, the Black-Knood,

son of

Lam-Finn, i.e., the White-Handed,

son of

Adnamon,

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son of
 Tath,
 son of
 Oghaman,
 son of
 Beoghaman,
 son of
 Sru,
 son of
 Esru,
 son of
 Gadel Glas, whence the Gadelians of the mediæval myth,
 son of
 Niul,
 son of
 Feniusa Farsa,
 son of
 Baath,
 son of
 Magog.

The legendary epic presently to be related, of which the foregoing are the chief personages, exhibits one name only of scholastic origin, *i.e.*, the last. Though it teems with scholastic and Biblical allusions, the personages are ancient ethnic gods and heroes taken from their true ethnic position by those who fashioned the Gadelian legend.

In Grecian and Norse tradition, and indeed, in the ethnic traditions of all nations, men represented their ancestors as having been the children of the gods. Thus, the Homeric kings are always spoken of as Jove-sprung. Their gods were the highest conception of anthropomorphic dignity and beauty which men could form, and to them naturally they ascribed their own origin and generation.

In ethnic times the Irish bards and historians

attributed to a similar source the origin of their aristocracy, if not, of the whole Gædilic or Gælic race. In spite of the disturbances and corruptions wrought in the ethnic traditions by the systematizing, order-loving genius of the Christianized bards, a closer analysis reveals traces of a close connection in origin between the early heroes and the gods.

When the spirit of Christianity began to pervade the island and to reconstruct according to its own genius the materials which it inherited from the bards, a certain fusion and disruption of the links which united the pedigrees of the ruling families to the Firbolgic, Fomorian, or De Danān races, began to take place. The kings falling under monastic influences, and dissociating themselves from ethnic traditions and associations, gradually came to regard their bardic pedigrees with disfavour in so far as their origin was traced back to those gigantic and supernatural persons whom they were now taught to regard as demons.

We would, therefore, naturally expect that the royal pedigrees would, in Christian times, turn aside from their ancient direction, and flowing through some human or heroic—at all events not clearly divine—channel, connect themselves in some form with sacred history. Now it may be, and probably was the case, that the Milesian legend did exist in pagan times, though not exactly in the form in which we find it. It may be that the ethnic Irish regarded their gods as having been at some remote time, expelled out of the material sovereignty of Erin by a race of matchless champions, invincible indeed, but mortal, from whom were descended the kings and princes of the island. Some account of the retirement of the gods into invis-

bility was necessary ; and this would appear an adequate and satisfactory explanation. In the purely ethnic times, however, the heroes afterwards named Milesian, were but a younger and more human branch of the great Fir-Shee race. The names Alloid, Adnoman, Tath, Sru, Esru, Niul and Baath, appear equally in the Milesian pedigree and that of their predecessors.

It was upon these heroes who had performed the blessed achievement of expelling the Tuatha De Danān out of Erin, that the Christianized bards seized as a link to connect the genealogy of the Irish kings with the east and with sacred history. They perverted the pedigree of the Milesians, and instead of deriving them from the Tuatha De Danān or Fomorian peoples, ascribed to them a foreign and eastern origin, bringing them into close connection with Biblical personages and events.

That the legend, so far as it relates to the sons of Milesius, was originally a part of the pure ethnic traditions, is shown by the fact that there is in it no trace of scholastic or Christian ideas, such traces appearing only, though copiously, in the history of the Gadelian ancestors of Milesius, and of Milesius himself, a history which is composed mainly of scholastic fabrications. Milesius was an ethnic god or hero named Gollam, or the Warrior, who, under his Latinized name of Milesius, or Milith, has given his name to a nation.

At the same time, though the mediæval bards fabricated the Gadelian history, moulding it into a sort of epic continuity, the names of the personages are ethnic, being the names of ancient dimly-remembered person-

ages once renowned in bardic lore. Even in this the only portion of the mythical history of Ireland due to Christian imaginings, a certain important substructure is pagan, and descended to the monastic writers from the pre-Christian bards. The Gadelian legend resembles the fabrications collected by Geoffery of Monmouth concerning early English history, with the exception, that the successive characters in the Irish legend, were originally ethnic realities used as materials by scholastic fabricators. The edifice is of mediæval construction, but the stones are ethnic.

The careful student will see also that the Gadelian legend is not one simply, but one formed out of many. From the third to, probably, the seventh century, A.D., there were growing, in many parts of the island, legends connecting the pedigrees of the aristocracy with the east, the central figure being, in each, different. Eventually all these came into collision, and being powerless to destroy one another, in consequence of the great reverence attaching to all traditions, were entered together *en masse* in the histories, and gradually, and in the course of centuries, settled each into an appropriate place, so that out of the many topical legends was framed one, the central figures falling into a certain genealogical line. Thus was formed the Gadelian epic, terminating in the Milesian.

CHAPTER III.

THE GADELIAN LEGEND, OF MEDIÆVAL AND SCHOLASTIC
ORIGIN.

FENIUSA FARSA, an ancient King of Scythia,* smitten with the love of learning,† abandoned his hereditary dominions, and travelled southwards till he reached the plain of Shinar, where he arrived shortly after the confusion of tongues. This was in the forty-second‡ year of the reign of Nion, son of Pelus.

Before leaving Scythia, Feniusa left his eldest son, Ne-niul, as regent, bringing his younger son, Niul,§ with him. Encamping at Shinar, he sent out seventy-two men to learn all the known languages of the world, on whose return he founded an university, at which students from the whole earth were taught.|| To Niul he assigned the provostship of his university.

Feniusa Farsa appointed to one of the chief profes-

* As I have said, the Gadelian legend is composed of genuine ethnic materials, nor was it invented by one man, but by many. Like the ethnic legends, it grew and was not made. Before Feniusa Farsa was King of Scythia; he was King of Scotia, or Ireland. The desire to give an eastern origin to the race supervened, and Scythia took the place of Scotia.

† We see here, and all through the legend, its scholastic origin.

‡ The extreme accuracy of the dates, battles, genealogies in early Irish history, forms a great stumbling-block in the determination of the meeting-point of authentic and mythical Irish history.

§ There is some significance in these related names which I cannot explain. Historically, this statement seems to indicate the wide separation between the literati and the princely class in the scholastic ages.

|| This is a reflection thrown into the region of myth, from a country whither foreign students were perpetually arriving in the sixth and succeeding centuries.

sorships in this university; Gadel, son of Eathoir. Here we have the more ethnic tradition incorporated into the Gadelian narrative. Eathoir was one of those three great divinities who occupied the island when invaded by the Milesians. He is said to have first invented the Ogham* characters, and, therefore, the learned Gadel would naturally be his son. His history would, therefore, suggest itself at the mention of Feniusa Farsa and his university. But the latter was, also, himself stated to have had a son of the same name, and having the same attributes. Gadel was, in fact, the great mythical grammarian; but, in one account he was the son of Feniusa Farsa, and, in another, of the god Eathoir, or Mac Cuill. The last compiler harmonized matters by representing them as different persons, and wrote his history, doubtless, hoping that Eathoir was not the god Mac Cuill, but somebody else, an eastern.

A third tradition, however, represented Gadel as the son of Niul, son of Feniusa Farsa. Thus, there are three Gadels, one, the true ethnic Gadel, son of the god Eathoir, another, the son of Feniusa Farsa, and a third, his grandson, the son of Niul. From him his descendants were named the Gadelians, *Gálce*, the *Gædhil*, or the *Gæl*. This is the regular bardic title of the Irish race, the *Clanna Milith*, or Milesians, being used to differentiate them from the immortal and invisible inhabitants of the isle, the gods, or *Fir-Shee* races, *Fomorians*, *Tuatha De Danāns*, &c. It has been supposed that the hero *Gædhil*, or Gadel, was a

* The Ogham characters resemble the Norse runes in being composed of straight strokes.

mediæval imagination, originating in the then general name of the Irish race, as the Saxons imagined Brute to have been the prime ancestor of the Britons. From the intimate and vital connection of the name with the Celtic bardic literature, I, however, believe Gadel to have been a real pre-historic personage, and that the race received its name from the hero, not the hero from the race.

After the death of his father, the fame of Niul as a teacher grew so great that Pharaoh Cingris invited him to visit Egypt, and instruct the youth of the country. Niul accepted the invitation, and the Egyptian King conferred upon him the lands of Capacirunt,* on the coasts of the Red Sea, and, also, his beautiful daughter Scota,† in marriage. Their son was Gadel Glas, whence the Gadelians.

While Niul here instructed the youth of the Egyptians, the Hebrew nation, flying from the bondage of Pharaoh, pitched their camp in the neighbourhood of Capacirunt.

No chronological objection can be made to the statement, that Niul, the fifth in descent from Japhet, should have been contemporary with Moses; for, as Keatinge acutely remarks, in those ages of the world

* I think it possible that Capacirunt ought to be Capa Ciaran, or Cape Clear. Such perversion of names, in order to make them harmonize with the full development of the Gadelian legend, is noticeable all through. If this conjecture be correct, the island of Cape Clear, which was celebrated in the scholastic ages, gave birth to that fragment of the epic which procured insertion here. Cape Clear means the Cape of the Clerics. St. Ciaran founded the ecclesiastical community of this island. The chief strand on the island is still called Ciaran's Strand.

† We shall meet Scota, i.e., the Scotie or Irish queen again, as the wife of Milesius. Niul, accordingly, occupied at one time the position accorded to Milesius in the full development of the legend.

the lives of mankind were very long, as may be proved from the testimony of Scripture.

Niul visited Aaron in his camp, and, having exchanged courtesies, they parted well pleased.

It happened on the same night that the young prince, Gadel Glas, was bitten in the neck by a serpent, some say, as he was swimming in a river, though others assert that the serpent came out of the adjacent wilderness, and bit him in his bed. His father, having learned from Aaron of the miraculous power wielded by his brother, brought the boy to the Hebrew camp, where he was cured by Moses with his staff. A green mark, however, remained where the bite had been, whence his surname of Glas, or green.*

Other circumstances are also mentioned, which show that the Scythians and the Hebrews entertained a high opinion of each other.

When Sru, son of Esru,† son of this Gadel Glas, presided over the Scythian settlement of Capacirunt, they fell under the displeasure of Pharaoh, and probably being enervated from overmuch attention to learning, were driven out by the Egyptians. Sru now led away his people in twenty-five ships, and landed in Crete,‡ when, after reigning some years, he died.

* Gadel Glas was an ethnic god or hero. There is no difficulty about the surname, Glas. It refers to the tradition as to his raiment or his armour.

† These names, Sru and Esru, occur also together in the divine pedigrees. They are very ancient dimly-remembered gods, therefore, like the other personages of the Gadelian legend, could have been employed by the scholastics without any very noticeable outrage on the ethnic traditions.

‡ This is a name for Ireland, viz. : the country of the Curaidhe, Cu-raidhe, or Cu-ree, the champions or heroes, i.e., the race of the Hounds.—See Part viii., chap. 1.

The next king, Heber Scot, led the Gadelians back into Scythia, having sailed through the Hellespont and Euxine, and up the Tanais.

It will be remembered that when Feniusa Farsa left Scythia to improve his education, he left his eldest son Ne-niul in charge of the kingdom. The descendants of Ne-niul, who had deemed that their kinsmen had gone completely off, and devoted themselves for good to the things of the mind, do not appear to have at all relished this hankering of their cousins after the flesh-pots of worldly wealth and power, and received them in a very uncousinly manner. The Gadelians, however, who seem to have quite forgotten their craze for learning, gave a very good account of themselves in war, and in one of the engagements, Tath,* the son of Heber Scot, slew Riflor,† son of Rifil,‡ son of Ne-niul, with his own hand.

Ne-niul and Rifil, sons of Riflor, now arouse the whole Scythian nation against their cousins, who showed so plainly that they had not quite lost the power of wielding the sword while they held the pen.

The Gadelians alarmed, retired hastily into the country of the Amazons,§ where they continued a year, and under the command of Adnamon and Heber the Second, sons of Tath, son of Aguamon, son of Ruogaman, son of Heber Scot.

* This name also occurs in the pedigree of the gods.

† Ri-flor, i.e., King of Ireland. The Irish believed Scotia to have been derived from Scyth, equivalent to the Latin Flora. Thus, in spite of the Tanais, &c., we do not travel beyond Ireland.

‡ I.e., the poet-king.

§ Such importance do I attach to slender allusions, that, even here, I feel a strong suspicion that Adnamon, in some ancient Irish lost cycle, is mixed

After this, and under the command of Alloid,* Lam-Finn and Lam-Glas, sons of Adnamon, and Caicer and Cinq, sons of Heber, they set sail in three ships, sixty persons in each ship, till they came into the narrow sea that flows from the northern ocean, where they were surprised by a violent storm that drove them on an island called Caronia,† in the Pontic Sea.

Here, Heber the Second and Lam-Glas died and were buried.

Setting sail once more, they encountered violent weather and sunken rocks. While in this trouble, Caicer, who was a druid and prophet, predicted that they were fated to occupy no land permanently until they reached an island in the western main.

Eventually they reached the land of the Goths, or Gothia,‡ where they remained for six generations, and 150 years. These generations in the reigning family were Lam-finn, his son Heber the Third, or the White-Kneed, his son, Fæbar Glas, his son, Ne-niul the Second, his son, Nugat, his son, Dēga.§

In the reign of Bratha, son of Dēga, the Gadelians sailed from Gothland, having with him as commanders

with such female warriors. The Irish believed that there was a sunken island in the sea between Ireland and Scotland, named Fionchæra, inhabited by fierce and warlike women. The three sons of Tuirenn, had to bring out of this island, a spit, as part of the great eric fine of Lu Lam-fáda.

* Manannán, the great sea-god, is set down sometimes as the son of Lir, or the Sea, sometimes as son of Alloid.

† This, too, I feel certain, is some scholastic perversion of a name that once stood for Ireland. The perpetual perversion of such names arises from the fact that, in the topical legends, which together went to the creation of the full Gadelian legend, each personage was credited with the colonization of Ireland. It may be Capacirunt again without the Caps.

‡ *I.e.*, Scotia.

§ To each of these the colonization was attributed in the original legends. Here all that is distinctive is wiped out.

Oigé and Vige,* sons of Alloid, son of Ne-niul, also, Mantan and Caicer. They seemed to have sailed back through the Hellespont, passing by Crete, until they reached Spain. Here they conquered the natives in many battles, and established themselves in the sovereignty of the island. Here, too, the family of Alloid was swept away in a pestilence.† Alloid left a son named Bratha.

In Spain,‡ Brōgan, son of Bratha, founded Tor Brogan, the city of Braganza, near Corunna. This Brogan had ten sons, who took part in the Milesian invasion of Ireland, and gave their names to various mountains and territories there.§

One of these sons, Billí,|| was the father of a prince named Gollam, or the Warrior, whose name, Latinized into Milith (Miles), or Milesius, has given

* The difficulties of the last redactors labouring to preserve verisimilitude must have been very great. They wished to retain everything, and yet make the narrative harmonious. The sons of Alloid must naturally have died a century before this. Caicer, too, should have been well dead at this time. He, however, was a druid, and could keep himself alive by magic.

† When such statements appear, we may conclude a divinity. The Christianized bards and monks delight to so record the disappearance of gods. Alloid, as I have said, appears in the Fir-Shee pedigrees, and, as the father of one of the most famous of the Irish deities.

‡ The mythical derivation of the Irish race from Spain arises from what I believe to have been an historical fact, i.e., extensive commercial communication between Spain and Ireland in early ages. That the Carthaginians had intercourse with Ireland is shown from the testimony of Avienus.—See p. 27.

The name, Hibernia, certainly points to the notion current that the Irish were a branch of the Spanish Ibēri. In early historic times there was no communication between Ireland and Spain, therefore, the notion of a Spanish invasion of Ireland is not mediæval, but must be referred to the earlier times, when Carthaginian and Spanish communication with Ireland was considerable.

§ We see here a proof of what I have stated, viz., that the Gadelians were indigenous native heroes or gods.

|| *Query*, was it from him the Rock of Bil took its name?

to the Irish race a name which will, probably, cling to them to the end of time. From him all the princely families of Ireland claimed descent. In the pictorial narrative, which forms this portion of the bardic or monacho-bardic history, he stands out with a clearness and greatness worthy of his dignified position, as the founder, mythical or otherwise, of the Irish race.

Brōgan, with his ten sons and numerous grandchildren, having engaged in war with the native Spaniards, overthrew them in many battles, and became, under the Spanish monarch, the most distinguished family in the peninsula. In these wars, the young Milesius fought with signal bravery, and acquired much renown.

On the cessation of war, he fitted out a fleet and collecting a body of warriors of the same spirit as himself, he sailed eastward, retracing the course of his ancestors, intending to revisit the Scythian metropolis, whence his people had first issued forth upon the world. Sailing through the Hellespont and Euxine, he entered the Tanais, and marched into Scythia.

The Scythian King, Rifloir,* received him with more welcome than his predecessor of the same name had received the earlier Gadelians on their return from Egypt. Here he so distinguished himself by prudence and bravery, that the king gave him supreme command of his troops, together with his daughter Seng in marriage. His first sons born here were

* We have had this king before. The name is evidently generic, standing, apparently, as a symbol of the ethnic and mundane side of the Irish mind, the Gadelians representing the scholastic and Christian.

Donn,* and Arech the Red-browed. Leading the Scythian armies, he conquered the surrounding nations, and extended the limits of the monarchy. Finally, the King, alarmed at his growing greatness, and the favour with which he was regarded by the people, formed a plan to despatch him. Milesius being informed of this, resolved to leave the kingdom, but, first assembling his own Gadelian warriors, forced his way into the palace and slew the ungrateful monarch. Then, taking ship, he sailed down the Tanais into the Black Sea, and, steering southwards, through the *Ægean*, reached Egypt, landing at the mouth of the Nile.

Here he was favourably received by Pharaoh Nectonebis, who gave him his daughter, Scota,† in marriage, his first wife, Seng, having died, and advanced him to the command of the Egyptian army. In Egypt he waged a great war against the Ethiopians, whom he defeated in many battles, and finally made tributary to Pharaoh. Here Scota gave birth to two sons, Heber Finn and Amergin,‡ surnamed the Druid.

After seven years, Milesius, tiring of Egyptian life, and having recalled the ancient prophecy of Caicer,

* Here, again, Scythia is simply another name for Scotia, or Ireland. The reader must now see why these changes became imperative.

† Scota is, of course, the feminine of Scotus, and means, simply, the Irish (heroine). That the ethnic Irish knew themselves as the Sooti, and that this heroine was an earthly personage, and not a mediæval imagination is shown from the fact that one of the ethnic tombs in the neighbourhood of Slieve Mish, in Kerry, was named from her. Ill-informed writers treat all these legends as similar in kind with the scholastic legends of Saxon England, but there are essential differences.

‡ After the Milesian invasion of Ireland, this Amergin is said to have collected and compiled the history of the natives. It is to be regretted that the monks who asserted this did not do so themselves. The mouth of the Ovoca river was from him called Inver Amergin.

that the true home of his race would be found in an isle of the western main, set sail from Egypt apparently with the object of forcing some north-eastern passage into the Atlantic. Landing, for a time, in the isle of Irené,* off the Thracian coast, Scota gave birth to a third son, called Ir.

Thence, landing in Thrace, he marched northwards through the continent, till he reached the Baltic Sea, when, again collecting a fleet, he sailed to an island named Gothiana,† which divides the Baltic from the Arctic Sea. Here Scota gave birth to a fourth son, Colpa,‡ surnamed of the Sword. Thence, taking ship once more, he sailed to Alba,§ or Caledonia, which he plundered, and taking the booty on board, sailed past the Orkneys, down the British Channel, and thence, through the Bay of Biscay, to Spain.||

On his arrival, he found both the Spanish and Gade-

* Ireland, again, *scilicet* Ierné. Ir was drowned at the isle of Skelig Michil, off the Kerry coast, in the Milesian invasion. Hence, the statement here, that he was born on an island off the Thracian, i.e., the Irish coast. Also, the reference to Ireland as Irene, not Sootia, the historian imagining that the name had some connection with Ir.

† Ireland, i.e., the country of the Gothi, or Scoti. In all the legendary history, there is a sort of conflict between the north and the south of Europe, the ethnic traditions being connected with the north, the Christian and scholastic with the south.

‡ From him, Inver Colpa, the mouth of the Boyne, now Drogheda.

§ This is a pre-historic shadow cast from the predominance of Irish influence in Caledonia in historic times.

|| This studious avoidance of Ireland is remarkable. In the more ancient legends Milesius' great deeds were really performed here, witness his presence in Scythia, Irene, Gothiana, all being synonymous of Ireland. In the full development of the epic, the conquest of Ireland was kept for his sons, therefore, Ireland is sternly excluded from the field of his operations. Similarly every one of his ancestors was in some tradition credited with the colonization of Ireland, but, for the same reason have, in the epic, been thrust away into Crete, Scythia, and anywhere out of Ireland.

lian nations reduced to deplorable extremities, owing to the incursions of Goths and other warlike nations. These, Milesius defeated in fifty-four great battles, and expelled out of the kingdom. In consequence of these victories he became monarch of almost the whole peninsula.

At length, Milesius, the great traveller and warrior, died at home in Spain, leaving to his sons the task of the colonization of Ireland. The history of Milesius, though possessing a certain largeness and epic grandeur in outline, is really very defective. Had the bards, instead of the monks, taken this great character in hand, we would have, as it were, seen him. He would stand out in the epos vividly and clearly, like Cuculain. We would have felt his greatness. He would have become to us a living breathing incarnation of heroism and kingliness. The scholastic Irish were great in annals and chronology, but the functions of the poet and maker were not theirs, nor vividness of perception, nor sympathy, nor grandeur of thought. Heroism and poetry owed nothing to the new order.

CHAPTER IV.

INVASION OF IRELAND BY THE SONS OF MILESIOUS.

OWING to a new invasion of the foreigners already mentioned, and a great scarcity of corn, the Gadeliens determined to send out an expedition in quest of some less troubled land, to which they might depart out of Spain. To this course they were impelled by Ith, son

of Brogan, the uncle of Milesius, who, on a starry night of frost, had, with the aid of a telescope, distinguished Ireland. This was opined to be the isle of destiny predicted long since by Caicer the prophet. Ith, himself, was unanimously selected for the enterprise, who, taking with him his son Lewy,* surnamed Laid-ken, and trusty comrades, set sail for the shores of Erin.

In reading the ensuing narrative, it must be remembered that we are not perusing an account of historical peoples, but the imagined exploits and achievements of divine or semi-divine heroes, of superhuman power and stature, for thus only can we realize in thought the events described.

Ith, landing on the northern coast, was informed by friendly natives, perhaps, the now subjected Fir-bolgs and Nemedians, that the isle was called Inis Elga,† that it was held by a wondrous race named the Tuatha De Danān, three princes of whom ruled over the rest, and that they now, at a place called Aula Neid,‡ were disputing about the possession of certain treasures which had belonged to an ancestor.

This wondrous race was, in fact, the gods of Erin, dwelling till now visibly in the island, and exercising a material sovereignty.

* This Lewy was ancestor of a nation celebrated in the heroic ages, the Corca Lewy, or children of Lewy, who held the south-west of Ireland. That there was once a great Ithian legend, of national importance, is shown by the fact, that Ith was connected with the north of Ireland, and his son Lewy with the south. Laid-Ken = Head of Song.

† *I.e.*, the noble island.

‡ The stone-house of Ned, the war-god. It was a great circular enclosure of stone, a temple of the ethnic Irish, in the barony of Innishowen, County Donegal.

Nothing daunted, Ith, leaving fifty men to guard the ship, marched northward with the remainder, till he reached Aula Neid, and presented himself to the wrangling deities. Struck by his appearance and address, they referred to him the arbitrament of their dispute.

Ith, in giving judgment said, that since fortune had made them princes of so fruitful an isle, abounding with honey^{*} and acorns, milk, fish, and abundance of corn, and since the air was neither hot nor cold, but exceeding temperate and wholesome for human bodies, they ought not to spend their time in quarrelling, but should divide the island and all things else equally between them, and live in peace and happiness. So saying, he divided amongst them the treasures.

After this, taking his leave, he departed southwards to reach his ship, but the gods alarmed at the praises he bestowed upon the island, and apprehensive of future attempts at conquest, despatched after him one of the brothers, Mac Cuill, with 150 warriors, who, overtaking Ith upon the plain, since known by his name,^{*} there slew him and most of his people. His son Lewy, however, succeeded in reaching the ship, bringing with him his father's body.

Returning to Spain, and relating all that had taken place, the descendants of Brōgan determined to be revenged upon the people of the island, and, under the leadership of Heber and Herēmon,[†] the eldest of the

^{*} Moy Itha, near the mouth of the Finn, Loch Foyle, Co. Donegal.

[†] Heber was afterwards slain by his brother in the battle of Geashill, but, at one time, Heber was certainly the great Milesian hero of the island. The same sons are attributed to him as to the god Partholān, mythical sovereign of the whole isle (p. 81), showing, that at some remote time, Heber was

sons of Milesius, in thirty ships, set sail from Tor Brōgan.*

The sons of Milesius who take part in this expedition are Heber, Heremon, Donn, Amergin the Druid, Arech the Red-Browed, Ir, Colpa of the Sword, and Arannan. With them came their cousins, the sons of that Ith who first adventured to land on the island, and various other kinsmen, descendants of Brōgan, grandfather of Milesius. Scota, the wife of Milesius, and other women, accompany the expedition.

Landing safely at the mouth of the Slaney, they marched inland till they reached Tara, where the mysterious race of the Tuatha De Danān were then collected, and, undeterred by all they had heard of their strange foes, the mortal sons of Milith, enter the weird assembly. There the sons of Milesius demand possession of the island, or a battle, to decide who shall be its owners. To this, the De Danāns reply, that they had been unchivalrously treated by the invaders, and were not prepared at such short notice to wage war with such heroes as they saw before them. They finally left the arbitration of the matter to Amergin the Druid, in whose countenance they said they discerned indications of honour and integrity.

Then followed one of those remarkable arrangements,† examples of which perpetually occur in the

regarded as of a dignity commensurate with that of Partholūn. It was evidently at the time when the Irish knew themselves as Hiberni that Heber appeared so great. Thus, probably, the Irish Heber was the Spanish Iber, founder of the Iberi.

* Braganza.

† Thus Goll mac Morna declares that he has vowed never to attack an enemy by night, or under any disadvantage. Conaill Carna, fighting with the slayer of Cuculain, directs his own left arm to be strapped to his side,

bardic literature. Amergin decides that the inhabitants were entitled to notice of the invasion, and that now the Milesians should again embark upon the sea, and go out nine "waves" from the shore ere returning, the inhabitants, in the meantime, to prepare such resistance as they could.

The Milesians accordingly return to the mouth of the Slaney, and, embarking, row to the prescribed distance, after which, they turn shorewards again the beaks of their galleys. To their amazement, the shore has disappeared, they see nothing but the illimitable sea upon every side, and weary themselves with rowing as they look round eagerly for indications of land. By their enchantments and magic, the inhabitants have caused the island to shrink to the dimensions of a hog's back on the surface of the sea. Now, however, Amergin the Druid, being called on by his brethren, puts forth in opposition his own necromantic power, overpowers the spell of the Tuatha De Danān, and reveals the shore once more to the eyes of his comrades. Again, the Tuatha De Danān pour a magic darkness over the fleet, so that they are immersed in complete blackness, and cannot see each other; but once more the power of Amergin is sufficient, he abolishes the spell of the De Danān enchanter, and restores the light.

Thus foiled, the Tuatha De Danān raises a terrific storm, the seas run mountains high, the galleys are tossed to heaven or drawn down into the depths, the wind howls, and the thunder rolls around them.

because his opponent is so disabled. The bardic literature teems with examples of this high ideal chivalrousness.

Amergin is powerless. Half the fleet drift westward around the ship of Heber, half eastward with that of Heremon. Before the arts of Amergin can allay the storm, the ship in which Donn* sailed was driven ashore upon quick-sands upon the Kerry coast, and here he was himself with his people miserably drowned, at a place ever after known as the House of Donn. With him, too, perished his brother, Arech the Red-Browed. On the same part of the coast, the ship in which Ir sailed was driven by the storm against the rock known as Skelig Michil,† which rises sheer out of the sea some miles from the shore where Ir and his people miserably perished. Also, Arannan, the youngest, was blown out of the rigging, and drowned in the Estuary of the Shannon.

Heber, however, himself, made good his landing in the Kenmare river. Then, says the ancient chronicler, the Tuatha De Danān trembled on their hills. Thence he marched to Slieve Mish, where they met and defeated the Tuatha De Danān, after which he proceeded inland. In the meantime, of the remaining brothers, Amergin the Druid landed at the mouth of the Ovoca river, and Heremon and Colpa at the mouth of the Boyne. Here, however, Colpa was drowned in coming

* That the sons of Milith were a younger branch of the gods is rendered probable, from the fact that this Donn is enumerated amongst the Fir-Shé of the south of Ireland. He is mentioned more than once amongst the other weird princes as Donn of the Sand Heaps. In the Ossianic literature, he and his people throw off their invisibility, and engage in a great hurling-match with the Fenian heroes of the Ossianic cycle.

† This rock became a Christian sanctuary. Nevertheless, the tradition above recorded shows, that even in ethnic times, it enjoyed some sacredness. I have heard that there is a cromlech on the top of the rock. If so, it must be the tomb of Ir.

ashore ; and the place now called Drogheda was, for centuries, known as Inver Colpa, from this hero.

Eventually Heber, Amergin, and Heremon combined their forces, and met the whole enchanted race at Tailtean,* where they utterly defeated their mysterious foes.

It was after this great defeat at the hands of the Milesians, whether we regard them as a younger race of gods or immense semi-divine heroes, that Mananān the sea-god came out of his mysterious world to comfort and advise his brethren. He found them dejected and in gloom, warned them that this disaster was a long time foretold ; but, that really they had lost nothing, for, through their attribute of invisibility, they might still enjoy the island as before. He, therefore, advised them to contend no more against these chivalrous and unconquerable heroes, but to distribute themselves upon their pleasant hills over Erin, protected by the Fæd-Fia, and to lead henceforward a divine life, enjoying each other's society, and pursuing the various arts and crafts in which they delighted.

In this beautiful and quite epic story, the bards accounted for the origin of the invisible population of the island, *i.e.*, the gods, and how they came to exist side by side with the mortal descendants of Milesius. The Greeks explained the retirement of the gods from

* This Tailtean is west of the village of Teltown, in Meath, and is, as might be expected, the site of mounds, raths, cairns, &c. It was one of the great pagan cemeteries of ancient Ireland, consequently, a centre of ethnic religion or of periodic festive assemblies. Races and games were here celebrated. It is said that the founder of these games was Lu, the De Danān god, who inaugurated them in honour of his foster-mother, Tailtiu, wife of Mac Erc, last King of Fir bolgs.

earth by the fiction that they were incensed at the wickedness of men; the Irish represent theirs as having been conquered by a race of heroes, matchless, indeed, but mortal.

According to the Milesian legend, the gods who held sovereign rule, at this time, were three in number, Mac Cuill, Mac Cecht, and Mac Grian, three grandsons of the Dagda Mór, or Oll-Athair, the Mighty Father, who corresponds to the Zeus of Greek mythology. The wives of these three gods deserve special mention, they were, respectively, Fohla, Banba, and Eiré. In the bardic literature Ireland is variously known under these three names. These goddesses are not personifications of the island, but, on the contrary, the island took its names from them, being, variously, the island of Fohla, of Banba, or of Eiré, *i.e.*, the island once ruled by them, or sacred to them.

Of these names, the first is the least common, the second employed oftener, but the word chiefly used is the last, Eiré, of which Erin is merely the dative case.

So far as I can gather, Fohla has reference to intellect and learning, and is used in such contexts; Banba, to physical beauty and fertility. It is used in some such contexts as these: "Banba of many streams," "deep-loamed, flowery Banba." Eiré is used in martial or heroic composition, generally in the form of the genitive, Eirin. All these goddesses are mentioned as contending* in battle with the Milesians, but, Eiré

* These three goddesses are introduced into Keatinge's account of the Milesian invasion as having met and welcomed the sons of Milesius, appearing in the form of beautiful and gracious women, each with her train of fifty maidens. The incident conflicts with the rest of the tale. It was evidently

is actually described as possessing the attributes of the goddess of war, and is probably an avatar of the Mór Rígu, or Great Queen, the Bellona of the ancient Irish.

In modern times the word has lost its heroic signification. A writer of to-day will employ Erin where the bards used Banba, and Ireland where they wrote Eiré.

CHAPTER V.

FROM THE MILESIAN INVASION TO THE FOUNDATION OF EMAIN MACHA.

HAVING conquered the gods, the Milesian heroes take possession of the island, putting their yoke on the necks of the Fir-bolgs, and such other mundane races as the island contained. Like Romulus and Remus, in Roman history, Heber and Herémon, the two eldest

composed first to stand by itself, or in a harmonious context, but was violently drawn into the vortex, which we see, plainly, swallowed up, and, to a certain extent, assimilated scores of traditions and tales referring to the invasion. This, taken by itself, seems one of the most graceful parts of the epic—Ireland, in the form of these beautiful goddesses, whose names were the names of the island, meeting and welcoming the Milesian race. It is plain from this, that there was, at one time, a received theory, that the gods did not resist the Milesians, but retired before them willingly into the invisible. The theory, that the Milesians fought with and subdued the gods, must be referable to a time at which the god-hood and irresistible might of the Tuatha De Danán had, through the operation of Christian ideas, considerably declined.

When Eire met the Milesians, it was in a form of rapid metamorphosis from bird to woman and woman to bird. The bird with which the Irish war-goddesses are associated, was the grey-necked, or Royston crow.—See Professor Hennessy's article on the war-goddess, *Revue Celtique*.

sons of Milesius, reign at first jointly. A mysterious quarrel, however, breaks out between them about the possession of three delightful valleys; they meet in battle at Geashill,* in the King's County, and, after a terrible conflict, Heber is overthrown and slain, and Herëmon reigns the first sole King of Ireland.

With Heber and Heremon commences a long line of mythical kings of Ireland, extending through a thousand years, and entered, with dates, battles, &c., in exact chronological order by the unsuspecting bards and monks who first formulated the history of Ireland, and reduced to order the elements of the immense mass† of bardic verse, which had come down to their times. These kings were either topical gods or national heroes, whose fame had become so great that they seemed to claim, as of right, a place in the royal list of kings of all Ireland. Yet such was the huge mass of topical and national tradition, and so numerous were the crowd of candidates for this honour, that, to allow only a few years for each, the date of the Milesian invasion and the foundation of the Milesian dynasties had to be pushed back to the astounding date of 1499 B.C.

Of many of these mythical kings there are most interesting tales recorded, but as these are disconnected, and would more fittingly enter into a general treatise on the subject of the bardic literature, I propose to give, with few exceptions, merely their names and

* There are various raths and mounds here still. Indeed, the site of all the ancient Irish battles will be found to contain such monuments. The tomb of Heber has been identified.

† The formulation of the history was gradual, probably, not receiving its final development and finish for centuries after the first rude formulation.

order, until reaching the point at which the great cyclic literature spreads itself like a sounding flood fed by a million streams and rivulets of poetical tradition and heroic thought, measureless, unfathomable ; historic, unhistoric ; human, unearthly ; mysterious as the human soul itself, and as incapable of complete exploration, and of having said concerning it the final word. Till reaching that literature, of which I purpose to supply the reader with a general and fairly-adequate conception, I shall merely set down the so-called kings in their order.

Heber and Herēmon, joint kings of Ireland.

Death of Heber at the battle of Geashill. Herēmon sole monarch.

Death of Herēmon ; his interment in the great pagan cemetery of Ariget-Ros on the banks of the Nore, parish of Rath Beagh, Co. Kilkenny.

Mueena, Lueena, Lainey, joint kings, sons of Herēmon ; Er, Orba, Forus, and Farna, joint kings, the four sons of Heber.

Irial, son of Herēmon.

Ethrial, son of Irial.

Conmæl.

Tihernmas—said to have introduced fire-worship.

Eocha Edguthach, descendant of Ith, the uncle of Milesius, whose death at the hands of the Tuatha De Danān precipitated the Milesian invasion.

Kermna and Sovarchy, descendants of Ir, that son of Milesius who was drowned off the Skelig Rock.

Eocha Fæbar Glas.

Fiecha Labrinna.

Eocha Mumho. He gave his name to the province of Munster. Mumho becomes Mumhon in the geni-

tive, pronounced as if Moon. The Danes to this added the suffix "ster." Thus Moon-ster, or Munster.

Angus, Rich in Swine.

Enna of the Silver Shields.

Rothecta.

Sedna.

Fiecha of the White Flowers.

Mineman.

Aldergöd.

Ollav Fohla, *i.e.*, the bard judge law-giver of Ireland. All ancient laws, whose origin was unknown, were ascribed to him, also territorial and political divisions. Thus he occupies a position somewhat resembling Theseus in Attic history.

Fionachta.

Slanöll.

Geidé the Great-voiced.

Fiecha Fionailches.

Berngall. "It was difficult for the stalk to support its corn in his reign."

Aileel.

Siorna.

Rothecta.

Elim.

Giallacha.

Art Imlach.

Nuada Fion-Fail.

Bras.

Eocha Apthach.

Finn.

Sedna.

Semeon Brac.

Duach Finn.

Muredac Balgrah.

Enna the Red.

Lewy the Dark-Brown.

Siorlam, *i.e.*, the Long-Handed.

Eocha of the Skiffs.

Eocha the Hunter and Coning, joint kings.

Lewy the Red-Handed.

Coning.

Art.

Fiecha Folgra.

Aileel Finn.

Eocha.

Argetmar.

Duach Lagra.

Æd the Red, Dithorba, and Kimbay, joint kings.

Macha the Red-Maned, daughter of Æd Ree, having put down all opposition, is elected High Queen of all Ireland.

B.C. 299. Kimbay, sole king. Foundation of Emain Macha, now Armagh. The remains of Emain Macha are to the east of the modern city, and are known as the Navan Fort.

CHAPTER VI.

MACHA, THE WAR-GODDESS, FOUNDS EMAIN MACHA.

B.C. 299. Kimbay.

His reign has acquired a curious interest from the fact that Tiherna,* the celebrated historian commences his history of Ireland at this date, rejecting as untrustworthy all that goes before. *Omnia monumenta Scotorum ante Ciombaoth incerta sunt.*

This remarkable statement, made in such an age, and by a man such as we know Tiherna to have been, has tended to create in many minds a belief, that a mind so philosophical would not have accepted the post-Kimbayan history, if it were not vouched for by documents of a reliable nature, and it is indeed true that he had access to many works since lost. Nevertheless, while I desire to leave the subject open for future inquiry, I cannot myself concur nor accept the authority of Tiherna as final.

* Died 1088 A.D., *testibus* *Chronicum Scotorum*, *Annals of Innisfallen*. Do. of Ulster. He was abbot of Clonmacnoise, and comarb of St. Ciaran its founder. That this monastery cultivated secular literature and history, is shown by the general mediæval belief that it was St. Ciaran who recovered and put in manuscript the great epic of the Tán-bo-Coolaney. Tiherna quotes Eusebius, Orosius, Africanus, Bede, Josephus, and St. Jerome, often comparing statements and solving discrepancies. He seems to have been familiar with some modes of correcting the calendar. He mentions the lunar cycle, and uses the dominical letter with the calendar for several years.

His great work is rather, in its earlier portions at all events, a history of the world, the chief contemporaneous personages of Greece and Rome being synchronized with those of Ireland.

Another not so eminent historian preceded him, Flann of Monasterboice, who died 1056 A.D., and whose historical works were metrical, but touching also on universal history.—See *MS. Materials*, p. 58, *et seq.*

In or about this time the city of Armagh, or Emain Macha, was founded.

The following is the legend of the foundation of Emain Macha, capital of Ulster, in the heroic ages; and the centre of the great Red Branch confederacy. Æd Roe, Dithorba and Kimbay, three potent princes of Ulster, agreed to enjoy, each in his turn, the sovereignty of all Ireland. Æd Roe* dying, left no son but a daughter, Macha, who claimed her father's right to the sovereignty. This claim Dithorba resisted; but the heroine collected an army, put down all opposition, and defeated and slew Dithorba. After this she married Kimbay; but without surrendering the sovereignty. Thus, she is in Irish history the only woman represented as ruling all Ireland in her own right.

The five sons of Dithorba having been expelled out of Ulster; fled across the Shannon, and in the west of the kingdom plotted against Macha. Then the queen went down alone into Connaught and found the brothers in a forest where, wearied by the chase, they were cooking a wild-boar which they had slain, and

Thus Ireland seems to have produced the first secular historians of northern Europe. Nestor, the first Russian historian, died 1113 A.D.; Snorro, the Icelandic compiler, belongs to the next century; Kadlubek, the first Polish historian, died 1223, and Stierman discovered no scrap of writing in Sweden older than 1159 A.D.—See Stowe, Cat. Vol. i., p. 35.

* Æd Roe, though mentioned in the line of Milesian Kings, was, strictly speaking, a topical god. This is shown partly by the fact that he was the father of Macha, and partly because his palace was called the Sidh of Æd Roe. Sidh, pronounced Shee, being the regular title of the palaces of the Tuatha De Danān. From him the great Cataract of Assaroe on the Erne takes its name, being originally Eas Æd Roe, Ass-Ay-Roe, the Cataract of Æd Roe. He is said to have been drowned in it. He was the *genius loci*, topical deity or Far-Shee of the Cataract.

were carousing before a fire which they had kindled. She appeared in her grimmest aspect, as the war-goddess, red all over, terrible and hideous as war itself; but with bright and flashing eyes. One by one the brothers were inflamed by her sinister beauty, and one by one she overpowered and bound them. Then she lifted her burthen of champions upon her back and returned with them into the north. With the spear of her brooch she marked on the plain the circuit of the city of Emain Macha, whose ramparts and trenches were constructed by the captive princes, labouring like slaves under her command.

It is not stated how it was that Kimbay came to be her husband; but from the analogy of other similar legends in the literature, I believe that she, too, wooed Kimbay and endeavoured to bind him in like manner, but that he subdued her, and that, subdued, she was changed in his arms from a fierce termagant into a beautiful and graceful maiden.*

Tiherna does not represent Kimbay as king of Ireland, but only of Ulster; and makes no allusion to Macha or the foundation of Emain Macha.

Tiherna recognised clearly the distinction between gods and men. Whether he distinguished with equal clearness between heroes and mundane historical kings is another question. Though I myself commence the historical period more than three centuries later than Tiherna, I yet do not reject the authority of his annals, merely regarding them as unproveable.

* The underlying idea of all this class of legends is, that if men cannot master war, war will master them; and that those who aspired to the Ard-Rieship of all Erin, must have the war-gods on their side. There is another war-goddess, Meave the Half-Red, appearing later on, who suffered no king to rule in Tara who did not make her his bride.

CHAPTER VII.

FROM THE FOUNDATION OF EMAIN MACHA TO THE REIGN
OF RURY MŌR, ANCESTOR OF THE RED BRANCH.

B.C. 299. Ugaineŷ Mŏr, emperor of all the west of Europe and as far as the Torrian Sea, *i.e.*, the Mediterranean. I have elsewhere spoken of this king as a pre-historic shadow thrown into the past from the stalwart figure of Niall of the Nine Hostages, that Irish monarch of the fourth century, A.D., in whose reign the Picts and Scots combined, broke the Roman power in Britain.

- B.C. 283. Lægaireŷ Lorc.
- B.C. 282. Covac Coel-Bray.
- B.C. 252. Lara of the Ships.
- B.C. 240. Meilg   the Much-Praised.
- B.C. 236. Moh Corb.
- B.C. 230. Angus the Poet.
- B.C. 225. Irereo.
- B.C. 223. Fer-Corb.
- B.C. 216. Connla the Gentle.
- B.C. 204. Oileel Caisf  chla.
- B.C. 189. Adamar.
- B.C. 187. Eocha Ailtl  han.
- B.C. 176. Fergus Forthamil.
- B.C. 169. Angus the Disgraceful.
- B.C. 129. Conaill Collamrah.
- B.C. 127. Nia Seghamain.
- B.C. 117. Enna the Hospitable.
- B.C. 116. Crimthann the Slaughterer.

B.C. 112. Rury* the Great, a descendant of Ir, son of Milesius, and the ancestor and founder of the great northern confederacy, the Red Branch of Ulster.

* So far the annals ; but when we find in all the pre-Milesian or divine cycles, the name Rury perpetually mentioned and always in connection with Ulster, we must regard the founder of the Clanna Rury as no other than that potent god. The procession of mythical history will thus be preserved, for the Clanna Rury have the characteristics of demi-gods ; and it is most natural to believe that a race of semi-divine champions appearing in the dawn of our history comparable to the *Ἡρώες* of Greek mythology, should have been the children or immediate descendants of gods. Moreover, this Rury the Great is even in the annals set down as son of Fomor, or the Fomorian—this word always representing a supernatural personage. Again, the great mediæval historian Tíhernab, who sternly excluded all the pre-Milesian races as well as a score or more of early Milesian monarchs, and who begins his history at 299 B.C., does not mention Rury Mör at all, evidently because he identified him with the god Rury.

PART VIII.

Approach of the Great Red Branch Cycle.

CHAPTER I.

THE RACE OF HOUNDS.

FROM the date of Rury Mör, the alleged kings of Ireland, or more properly speaking, kings of Tara, run on thus :—

B.C. 98. Ionadmar.

B.C. 95. Brasal, son of Rury Mör.

B.C. 84. Lewy Luainey.

B.C. 79. Congall Clareena, son of Rury Mör.

It was in the reign of this prince and under his leadership that the children of Rury conquered Ulster, founding there that powerful military clan which as the Red Branch fill with their glory and achievements the whole of the ensuing century. Out of the north of Ireland they expelled a race also most famous in these ages, the Ernai, the centre of whose confederacy was at Ballyshannon in the neighbourhood of Lough Erne, whence their name. The Ernai, thus driven out of Ulster, settled in the south-west of Ireland,

where they rapidly rose to the hegemony of the province.*

The name Congall is of importance at this epoch. That class of mythological or semi-mythological beings whom the Greeks named Heroes, in Irish history appear as Hounds. The three types of valour amongst the ancient Irish were the black-bird, the eagle or hawk, and the hound. I think it probable that at one time the black-bird was kept and trained for fighting like the game-cock. He is, perhaps, the lustiest and most daring for his size amongst the feathered race, and might well be employed for this purpose. In the more ancient lost literature, he probably occupied a more clear and distinct position as a type† of valour than in that which has actually reached us. In the existing literature there is something mystical in his connection with heroes, which, I believe, indicates a more antique phase of imaginative thought in which he appeared simply as a type. Thus, it is recorded of Cuculain, that in his single combat with the great southern champion Lōk, the son of Mōr-febis, Cuculain was severely wounded and his two black-birds were slain; and in another battle when Cuculain's battle-fury was upon him, we read, "then the black-bird of his valour arose within him."

In the literature which revolves round the later

* The Ernai, though expelled out of the north by the Clanna Rury, supplied the next Ard-Rie of Ireland, Dēga. From him the race took their tribe name of Clan Dēga. After a long predominance in the south of Ireland, the hegemony of the province passed from them to the children of Heber, Siol Heber.

† It occurs to me that he may have been for the war-gods what the grey-necked crow was for the war-goddesses, and that they were believed to assume his form.

heroes, Finn mac Cool and his companions, and which is much more modern, the heroes are represented as delighting in the song of the black-bird ; but all the allusions here are of an æsthetic character. The tone of this later literature is far more refined. The old rude great thoughts are softened down in every direction ; but I believe the æsthetic character of the black-bird in the Ossianic literature to have been derived, by degrees, from that ancient phase of thought which connected the black-bird on the fighting side of his nature with heroes and the heroic.

The hawk and eagle as types of valour do not require comment. They are the common imaginative possession of all races. Cuculain is called the destroying hawk of the Tán ; and he himself refers to Emain Macha as a nest of eagles.

The hound, I think, appears in no literature except ours in a character so great. He not only stands as the type of courage and invincible fidelity, but has given his name to the whole race of the demi-gods of ancient Erin. Nearly all the great champions and kings of this age which, *pace* the Irish chroniclers, I believe to be on the verge of the age of the gods, were hounds. Cu=Hound, the genitive of which is Con. In Irish the oblique cases are perpetually used, even with nothing to govern them. Thus Con-gall, the king at whose reign we are now arrived, means the White or Brilliant Hound. The most potent of his immediate successors was Onairy Mór, *i.e.*, Con-a-righ the Royal Hound ; while a great contemporary personage in the south of Ireland is Cu-roi, *i.e.*, Hound-King, really the same word but with different cases. In the same or the immediately succeeding

age, the king of Ulster, monarch of the Red Branch in the age of their greatest glory, is Con-cobar, the Foaming Hound or Hound of Help. The three invincible champions of the province under him are Cuculain, also Conculain, the Hound of Culain; Con-ail, his friend and avenger, the Noble Hound; and Lægairey, *i.e.*, Laogh-a-righ, the Whelp of a King. Then there are Cu-corb, the Chariot Hound; Con-laoch, the Hound's Whelp; Lewy mac-na-tri-Coin, *i.e.*, Lewy, Son of the Three Hounds; and other instances too numerous to mention. The heroic age of Ireland is, in fact, the age of the Hounds; and surely no nobler and more touching type of the heroic temper could be selected than this magnanimous brute.

In the later Ossianic literature, a change of thought similar to that alluded to in the case of the black-bird, befell the hound in his connection with heroes. The friendliness, amiability and beauty of the hound are, in that literature, directly eulogized and perpetually dwelt upon. He is praised and loved for his own sake and not absorbed in the all-devouring claims of human heroism as in the earlier ages. The hounds of the third century of our era, the age of the Fenian heroes, are dogs—the comrades of the warriors. Their separate histories and characteristics are preserved, and of them, which is very significant, the most celebrated is not male but female. This was Bran, the most renowned of all the dogs of the Fenian hunters. It is remarkable too, that the horse disappears in the later literature altogether, while in the earlier he occupies a foremost place. His name, like that of the hound, mingles with the names of heroes in the age of the Red Branch, thus—Ec-donn, the

Brown Horse ; Ech-beul, Horse-mouth, &c. ; while one of the greatest figures of the Red Branch literature is the Liath Macha, the huge grey war-horse of Cuculain, of divine origin and immortal like Achilles' steeds. All the war-steeds mentioned in this literature are male. It is remarkable that in the Iliad, the war-steeds are always mares, which would seem to indicate that the composition of the Iliad must be referred to an age in which the primæval heroic temper had passed away—an age comparable to that in Irish history which produced the Ossianic and not the Cuculainian literature.

These Hounds correspond, as I have said, to the "Ἡρώες" of Greek history. If this view be correct, we will then place the age of the Tuatha De Danān, or gods, as having ceased somewhere about the first century before Christ. I regard Rury Mōr as a god ; the Hounds of Ulster being his immediate descendants.

B.C. 64. Dēga.

This was the monarch of a great race of southern demigods the Ernai, covering the modern counties of Clare, Limerick and Kerry ; the Hounds or "Ἡρώες" of Munster ; henceforward called the Clan Dēga.

The next phasis of this giant brood exhibits them, subject to a semi-divine king called Curoi mac Dary, whose fortress* of stone was in the mountains west of Tralee. In one tale this Curoi is represented as rising out of the sea like some elemental genius. Of course, he is a druid and wields a magic power. He was slain by the great Ulster hero Cuculain.

* Temple.

I regard Conairy Mör (see next chapter) as a more national and central representation of the same being. Their names are really the same. They are of the same Ernean stock ; and Conairy Mör, at the date of his death, is represented as coming up out of this portion of Ireland.

A single type thus reproducing itself is frequently exhibited in Irish as in other heroic literatures.

B.C. 54. Factna the Righteous.

He is, to us, chiefly remarkable as the father of Concobar mac Nessa, king of the Red Branch during their great age, and as the grandfather by his daughter Dectera of Cuculain.

B.C. 38. Eocha the Melancholy.

He conquered Connaught and set over it a king, Aileel Mör, to whom he married his daughter Meave, the great termagant of the heroic age.

The epic wars of the ensuing period are waged between her and the Red Branch. That she ruled in Connaught as a powerful queen about this time is probable enough ; but in the epic literature she is a giantess—yellow-haired, pale-faced, bearing spear and shield, and rides to war in her chariot. It is said that she once put Cuculain himself to flight.

A great war was waged between Eocha and his three rebellious sons, Bras, Nar, and Lothar, terminating in the defeat of the latter at Drum Cree.

The renowned hero, Conaill Carna, one of the noblest figures in the Ultonian cycle and famous as the friend and avenger of Cuculain, is first mentioned in connection with this war. He led the armies of the monarch in the battle of Drum Cree, defeated and slew the rebellious brothers, and in the evening presented

to Eocha the gory heads of his sons. He also saved the monarch's life in the same battle. During the passage of the river Delvin by the royal army, Bras hurled a stone at his father which was intercepted by the shield of the Ultonian. Like David, after the death of the rebellious Absalom, this good king refused to be comforted for the loss of his sons. After the battle of Drom Cree* he never smiled.

Lewy Rievenerg, monarch of Ireland, A.D. 8, was the son of one of these brothers.

B.C. 23. Eocha Airem. In his reign men first began to bury their dead. The bards are correct in referring burial to the ethnic times, for their testimony has been confirmed by an examination of the mounds, *i.e.*, the tombs of ethnic Ireland. The ceramic art of the pre-Christian Irish, was, of course, rude and archaic, but not without indications of elegance and taste. There is in the Royal Irish Academy one beautifully-shaped cinerary urn, ornamented with a delicately-inscribed tracery. We thus see, even in the ethnic remains, that love of linear ornamentation which distinguished the MS. scribes of mediæval ages. Such ornamentation appears on the slab which closes the flagged entrance to the central chamber of the great mound of New Grange, on the Boyne. Irish mediæval civilization was, at all points, a regular development of the ethnic, affected, indeed, but not created by Christianity.

There is a pretty story recorded of this king, how he met a lady of the weird De Danān race, in a forest, making her toilet by the brink of a stream, having with her a silver bason with four birds of gold perched

* Parish of Kilcumney, W. Meath.

upon the rim, and how he wooed and married her. The lady's name was Eadane. Years passed away, and still his fairy bride remained with him fulfilling well all her duties as High Queen of Erin.

One night, when the King was dismissing his guests at Tara, a tall youth stood in the midst of the hall, who challenged the King to a game of chess. The monarch replied that the chess boards and men had been put away for the night, and were now in the women's apartment of the palace; but the stranger produced a wonderful board of diamond and golden men, whom he deliberately arranged on the board, inviting the King to be seated and commence the game. The wager was then determined, and it was settled that the winner should take from the other any thing that he chose. They played, and the King was beaten, after which the strange visitor suddenly disappeared.

It was not until the same night on the following year, that he reappeared, when he stood in the midst of the King's courtiers, and before any could stop him, carried off the High Queen, having first addressed to her a weird poem describing his own enchanted world.

This strange visitor was one of the Tuatha De Danān gods, Midir,* surnamed the Proud, son of the Dagda.

B.C. 11. Eterskel.

B.C. 7. Nuada Nect, of the ethnic kings.

* He wore a brooch of gold reaching from shoulder to shoulder, a shield with a silver rim and a boss of gold, and a sharp spear with rings of gold from the socket to the heel. There was fair yellow hair over his forehead, and his forehead was bound with a golden fillet to confine his hair.—“Manners and Customs,” Vol. iii., p. 162.

CHAPTER II.

FLORUIT AND DEATH OF CONAIRY MÖR.

B.C. 7. Conairy Mör, son of Eterskel.

The ancient cycle of ballad poetry in which this king is the central figure, has been condensed and epicized, so far as it deals with his death, into what, I cannot but think the greatest and most significant of the bardic tales. It is preserved in the most ancient of the Irish vellum MSS., the *Leavar na Huidhré*, written in the eleventh century. The language of the tale indicates a far earlier date as that of its final redaction; while the metrical excerpts, which it contains, and the rude greatness of the thoughts seem to relegate it to an age even prior to that of the *Cuculainian* literature. Conairy Mör and his slayers are alluded to by *Dûvac*, a writer of the fifth century.

This tale is the *Bruidin Da Derga*, i.e., the palace of *Da Derga*—this being the scene of the monarch's death.

Conairy Mör, sang the bards, reigned eighty* years,

* I fear that the historical monuments alluded to by *Tihernah* must have been immediately or remotely the imaginative bardic literature, and not more reliable documents or traditional metrical verse, which have since perished. For example, he ascribes to Conairy Mör the impossible reign of eighty years. This fact, at all events, shows that the chronology of these ages runs astray.

Again, he relates of *Fergus mac Leda*, a King of Ulster, in this age, that he was devoured by a *Piasta*, a sort of sea monster, while swimming between *Rathlin* and the mainland, a statement not indeed incredible, but so much in harmony with the bardic imaginative literature, that we cannot but believe it was there that *Tihernah* found it. He introduces the fanciful number of seven, in connection with *Cuculain*, in the following way:—

and during his time peace and prosperity prevailed over Ireland. From Spring to Spring no harsh wind roughened the hair upon the kine, the apple-trees with difficulty sustained the abundance of their fruit, vast quantities of nuts were found along the shores of the Boyne, and the sea annually cast up the secret treasures of her depths upon the strand at Inver Colpa.

Towards the close of his reign, Conairy expels out of Ireland his foster-sons, three brothers, sons of Donn Dess, a Leinster prince. They return with a foreign army, and, as pirates, make a descent on the coasts of Louth, ravaging the country up to Tara.

The seven Maineyas, sons of Meave, Queen of Connaught, come up from the west and join them, and there is a general revolt against the monarch.

Conairy Mör with a small retinue, returning from the south-west of Ireland, beheld all the land in flame, and fearing to encounter the enemy, turned southward into Leinster, travelling by the Bohar Cullen, by which communication was kept up between Leinster and

! "He was seven years old when he took arms, i.e., was knighted, seventeen when he followed the Tán, twenty-seven when he was slain."

Moreover, if the chronology of these ages, or even the genealogies and successions of kings, were matters of history at the time of Tihernah, they would have been adopted by all. The fact, however, is, that there is a conflict of opinion amongst all the native historians as to everything except the most striking and salient features. The chronology, genealogies, and successions are various in various authorities. Tihernah puts the reign of Eocha Airem before that of Eocha the Melancholy, others, after it. Tihernah puts the reign of Lewy Rievenarg, about a century after the age of Cuculain. According to others, Cuculain and Lewy were contemporary. In fact, the conflicting statements are so numerous and pronounced, that I am compelled to come to the conclusion that the authorities relating to the age were only those bardic compositions which owed their origin to other causes than the knowledge of actual fact.

Whether the reign of Conairy Mör was coincident with the floruit of Cuculain, or before or after, is also uncertain and the subject of conflict.

Tara. This road ran through the valley of Glan-na-Smól, along the upper Dodder, to the foot of Kippure, then, turning eastward, traversed the valley of Glen Cullen, and so entered Leinster by the Sugar-loaf mountains.

Along this road sped the King and his retinue, fleeing before the invaders. As they went, Conairy bethought him of a feudatory named Da Derga, on whom he had conferred lands and revenue, in order that he might hospitably entertain all wayfarers and strangers, whose palace and territory lay along the banks of the Dodder. It was the custom of the Irish kings, according to bardic historians, to establish such hostelries in every part of the country.

It is a *geis* druidic omen or prohibition to Conairy to see three red horsemen precede him on any road, but now, as they flee southwards along the Bohar* Cullen, far out in front the fatal horsemen† are seen riding before the King, red-haired, red-helmeted, clothed in red, and riding upon red steeds. Conairy recalls the omen, and bids his youngest son gallop forward and desire the red horsemen to tarry and fall in with the rear, but they travel swiftly and outstrip him. The youth reins in his panting steeds, and shouts after them the King's command. They, not turning their faces, or checking their pace, travel forward and

* This road connected Tara with the province of Leinster. Crossing the Liffey and Dodder it ran through Glan-na-Smól, on the left bank of the Dodder, entering Glen Cullen by Kippure mountain.

† These weird ones were three brothers, and are called by *Dúvac*, a contemporary of St. Patrick, the "three Red Heads of Leinster." They seem to have been a sort of male Furies, and their appearance a Nemesis for too great prosperity.

sing backwards a mysterious rhyme. The omen still precedes the King. A terror falls upon his people, they know the end is at hand.

Then they enter the valley of Glan-na-Smōl, the Thrush's Valley, and see the hospitable house of Da Derga, where the pot is never taken from the fire, or the labours of the cook suspended, and whose seven doors are ever open night and day, that all travellers and strangers may there find food and rest. There the King and his warriors see the red horses tethered to the door; the messengers of fate have entered in before the King; they rise as he comes in and welcomes him to the Bruidin.

The master, Da Derga, prepares a feast for the entertainment of his royal guest and those with him, who also are the great heroes of the heroic age of Ireland; but certain others beside heroes and kings partake of that banquet.* While they feast, a mysterious apparition deepens the gloom. From the Galtee mountains comes the swine-herd of Bove Derg the Southern god. All feasts to which he comes end in blood. He takes his place amongst the feasters, Far-Caillé, the Man of the Woods, leading his enchanted pig.

Omens thicken. At one of the doors an obscene female form appears, looking in out of the night. She leans against the door-jamb. The King she claims as her lover. He must sleep with her that night. She scoffs at all their bravery and might, and chaunts to them her many names.†

Out of Connaught, the seven Mainey's, sons of Queen

* Our Mars Sylvanus?

† This terrible one appears to be Death.

Meave, come up and join the rebels, sons of Donn Desá. They all put to sea with the plunder of Bregia. From the sea they behold far away the flashing retinue of the King travelling southwards into Leinster by the Bohar Cullen. They know that he will spend that night at the Bruidin of Da Derga.

As darkness falls, one, Inkel, is despatched as a spy to report on the number and disposition of the King's troops. He goes, and returning, describes all that he has seen in the haunted Bruidin. As he speaks, Ferrogane identifies the personages whom he describes. There he has seen Cormac Conlingas,* son of the King of Ulster, with nine comrades around him, all armed and arrayed like himself; there Conaill Carna, the great Ultonian Champion, whose bright golden hair would fill a reaping-basket; his countenance is sad and like one lacking a comrade.† There Mainey Minremar, who, with the two preceding, stand as hostages for the fidelity of the Ultonians. Three beautiful boys, too, Inkel has seen, whose long hair now curls‡ close to their heads, now unloosed, rolls down their backs. Men cannot avert from them their eyes, so beautiful are their countenances and their behaviour. These are the sons of the High King, and Ferrogane's own foster-brothers. Hearing them described, Ferrogane bows down his head and weeps, so that no voice was heard from his mouth till the third part of the night was gone, and the front of his casula was steeped with his

* This was one of the greater heroes of the Ultonian cycle.

† *I.e.*, Cuculain, his dear friend.

‡ This idea, I have been told, appears in Hindu poetry. The notion of the bard is that their vivid tresses sympathized with the emotions of their minds.

tears. There he has seen, as it were, a mountain with a rough hairy crest, and on each side of the crest two shining lakes. The mountain is the gigantic warrior, Mac Cecht,* he has sunk down in sleep with his head between his white knees. This is Eathoir, the god, who out of the invisible world has come down to guard Conairy Mör. The rebels retire nine fields when they hear of him. There, too, he has seen the Dagda Mör,† the ancient god, white-haired, presiding over the magic cauldron, and there the fiery living spear of Pisarr, which the sons of Turenn gave to Lu Lam-fáda and Lu to Celcar, son of Uther, and Celcar to Cormac Conlingas. Its head is plunged in a vessel filled with soporific drugs.

But outshining all is the great central figure of Conairy Mör, his countenance reflecting the majesty of a sovereign and the spirituality of a bard. Like the colour of the clouds at sunrise are the changing hues of his vast bratta, and like sundown on a plain of untrodden snow the red and white of his countenance, lit with eyes dark-blue, o'er which droop lashes chaffer black. Like the round moon glitters the great brooch upon his breast, thick-sown with gems along the edge, and amid his shining yellow hair flashes the refulgence of the royal Ard-Roth.‡ Above his head is a canopy of silver cloth, and at his right hand his sceptre§ of

* This was one of the three great deities whom the Milesians had conquered.—See Part vii., chap. 4.

† A certain procession of thought characterizes the history of the Tuatha De Danán. The floruit of the Dagda had, as it were, passed away. He is alive, but eclipsed by greatness of his grandson, Mac Cecht.

‡ How this was worn, I know not. Ware thinks it was worn like the aureole of a saint.

§ Brooch, crown, or tiara and sceptre, are all emblems of royalty in the heroic literature, but the chief was the brooch. In St. Columba's time, the Irish bards rebelled against the new Christian regime. The sedition assumed,

silver, with which, like eagles from their eyries, he summons forth his long-haired warriors. Beside him lies his sword, a hand's-breadth of it escaped from the scabbard, which shoots forth light beyond the light of royal candles, and from it came a voice singing sweeter than the sound of harpers harping in kings' houses.

Such is the scene below, but amongst the warriors still feast the red horsemen, and still the ghoul-like woman has not left, but to the roof-tree the spy sees the forms of three naked women tied, having their white limbs splashed with blood, and the cord of their slaughter around their necks. These are Bauves, daughters of Ned, the god of war. They were with Conairy as hostages that their father would not disturb the realm during his reign. The war-god has broken his promise, and his daughters have been, as it were, slain.*

That night the Bruidin was assailed by the rebel host, and Conairy's champions sallied forth to destroy the assailants; long lasts the thunder of the great strife, but, at length, the red horsemen drawing their pipes, mingle with Conairy's warriors, playing magic airs. The warriors follow blindly, and the weird messengers of fate lead them into the mountains. Deserted and forsaken, the monarch is surrounded by his enemies, "and early and alone the King of Temair was slain." Ferrogane stabbed himself rather than share in the impious deed.

in that mythus-making age, the following form: "They demanded from the Ard-Rie his brooch," i.e., surrender of his royal authority.

* This great tale starts, in its native weirdness and horror, straight from the heart of the barbaric ages. On every side it opens chasms and weird vistas into phases of thought and feeling, which we cannot now realize or understand.

The word Bruidin is yet unexplained. It is applied to some only of the ethnic remains. Mr. Crow suggests that it may be the root of the Greek *Πρωτεύειον*, the idea of hospitality being connected with both. So far as I can make out, the Bruidin is a rath more sacred than others, and more intimately associated with the presence of gods. Through a Bruidin, too, a river flowed, whatever may have been the significance of this. There is some mystic connection between the Bruidin Da Derga and fire. Mac Cecht, in this tale, strikes a fire before the King, which floods with flame the whole southern heavens. The student must remember that there is no mere fancy in these ancient tales; all the incidents have some deep meaning, growing, as they do, out of traditions intimately connected with the realities of the ethnic ages.

In the valley of Glan-na-Smöl, and hard by the road still called Bohar-na-Bicena, i.e., the road of the Bruidin, between it and the Dodder is a small conical mound. Whether this was the germ of the great palace of Da Derga, I cannot say, but incline to think that the real Bruidin was a great rath, since destroyed, through which the Dodder flowed.

PART VIII.

The Great Ultonian or Red Branch Cycle.

CHAPTER I.

CUCULAIN, SON OF SUALTAM.*

THE student of Irish history, arrived at this point, may not be inaptly compared to one who, after journeying through some sombre and intricate forest, whose gloom is not wholly unrelieved by small moonlit glades and the cheerful tinkle of living streams,† amid whose shadows are seen passing shapes weird and unearthly, now, suddenly emerging, finds around him the night, indeed, but such a night! flashing, as with stars and northern lights. Now, all over and on every side the bardic firmament glitters with bright-burning fires, heroic names and deeds innumerable, amongst whom, stars of the first magnitude, shine out the Champions of the North, the Red Branch Knights, Children of Rury.

* Or of the god Lu, the Ioldāna.

† That long dry list of Milesian kings might, had I space, have been illuminated with numerous bardic tales referring to each. All of them were the centres of ballad or even epic cycles of which, even still, there is a considerable residuum.

That this is so the student will find by a perusal even of the Annals of the Four Masters, in which these Kings show like peaks of a submerged world. This is more evident in Keatinge, while reference to the *index nominum* of O'Curry's works will supply the student with glimpses into the literature that underlies these names, which are really but salient points—peaks of a distant and untraversed land.

Heretofore the student, toiling along a path considerably shortened in this rapid narrative, has beheld Ireland producing her great names sparingly, but now, approaching the age of the Incarnation, he beholds how the island starting, as if from some magic slumber, all the deep fountains of life suddenly unsealed, teems as with some vast parturition. Out of the ground start forth the armies of her demi-gods and champions—an age bright with beautiful heroic forms, loud with the trampling of armies and war-steeds, with the roar of chariot-wheels and the shoutings of warriors—in the North the Red Branch, in the South the Ernai or Clan Dēga, in the West Queen Meave and her Champions, and in the South-east that mysterious Half-Red Meave and her martial grooms. From what dragon's teeth and when sown sprang forth this war-like crop?*

An Irish bias may possibly affect my judgment in this matter, though I should be sorry, indeed, that truth should, in any way and for any object, suffer through this cause, but I cannot help regarding this age and the great personages moving therein as incomparably higher in intrinsic worth than the corresponding ages of Greece. In Homer, Hesiod, and the Attic poets, there is a polish and artistic form, absent in the existing monuments of Irish heroic thought, but the gold, the ore itself, is here massier and more pure, the sentiment deeper and more tender, the audacity and freedom more exhilarating, the reach of imagination more sublime, the depth and power of the human soul more fully exhibit themselves.

show!

* My own explanation is, that the ethnic history has been tampered with; that these heroes and heroines are the immediate posterity of the gods.

To understand and test the force of my words the literature itself must be studied, if not in the original, then, in exact translations, for, neither here in this superficial sketch, nor in the more full and minute narrations of my epic series, in which the literature has been toned and condensed into the uniformity and homogeneity of a single integral composition, as I am well aware, is full justice done to the subject.

Here, in this age which surrounds the Incarnation, start forth the pre-historic or semi-historic demi-gods and champions of the Irish race.

Now, to Sualtam and Dectera* is born Setanta, surnamed Cuculain, whose glory fills the whole bardic records of the age. During his career he bears the weight of the vast epos into which the history of the times has resolved itself. Wild and improbable as is the whole narrative, weird with incursions from the supernatural world, with wizardry and enchantments, spurning the laws of nature, of space, and time, dazzling with the wild light of incredible heroisms, loud and agitated with the rush and noise of gigantic shapes writhing in superhuman battles, recalling the fabled wars of gods and Titans,† or the Miltonic

* Sister of Concobar mac Nessa, King of the Red Branch.

† Fergus mac Roy, recovering his sword long lost, addresses to it a song of welcome and endearment, and, as he wheels it around his head in a frenzy of joy, shears off the tops of three mountains. It is evident from this that the character of the great champions of the age, at least in the eyes of some of the bards, ascends to the gigantic. In my own attempt to treat the age epically, I have represented the stature as rather greater than human, but not gigantic. Otherwise it would be impossible to mould all into a harmonious and reasonable form. At the same time, I am aware, that a more Titanic treatment, by one having the necessary genius, might be more true to the bardic temper and traditions, and productive of a greater and more valuable literary result.

strife of celestial and infernal powers, the profound and vital humanity with which the whole is instinct, touches and stirs the spirit with the strangest and most unapprehended emotions. Like the moon, when through some wild obscure sky, ploughing her path amid the driving scud, a moment seen and then deep buried in the entombing clouds, but only to emerge undimmed, flooding the night with her glory; so through the spaces of that bardic sky, so through the shifting chaos of obscure epic tale, and the broken fragments of antique ruined* verse, ever flashes on the eye the wonderful glory of this extraordinary hero, till on the plains of Murthemney it sets for ever in enduring night.

Yet, once† again, in the unsubduable imagination, which ever accompanies the course of Irish history till the extinction of Irish independence, four centuries later a vision of the hero strikes upon the eye. St. Patrick, preaching at Tara to the assembled kings, declares that the hero and his comrades of the Red Branch, though types of all that is great and admirable to his hearers, now suffers the torments of hell, shut in

* The history and character of Cuculain and the great Champions of the age, cannot be determined from any single tale or poem. They traverse the whole literature as it treats of this age. Therefore, not one or ten tales would adequately suggest to the modern student the bardic conceptions of these Heroes. To the ancients each tale was imaginatively complete, being but a part of a great whole, with which they were, more or less, fully acquainted. Hence, one of the chief principles which has determined my own epic treatment of the history of Cuculain to its existing form. In telling one story I have drawn materials from many.

† This episode will be seen in the preface to the *Leabar-na-h-Uidhré*, published by the R.I.A. Though an echo of the ethnic ages, its mediæval spirit is shown by the attribution to Cuculain of dark hair. This type of beauty was not that admired in the pre-Christian ages.

for ever with the damned. Lægairey, son of Nial, refuses to believe, and challenges the apostle to the proof. Straightway an icy blast sweeps over the plain of Tara, cutting to the marrow of the bones with its keen fierce breath. "What means this icy blast?" cried the shuddering King. "It is a blast out of hell," answered the Saint. "Her broad gates are opened." "I see far away, eastward, a vast and snow-like mist that covers the face of the whole land. What is this, O Talkend?" "It is the Red Branch loosed from hell. The mist is the breath of their mighty men and war-steeds, and the steam of their sweat suspended above their host, and they are concealed in its folds." "Through the mist I see dark flying flakes, resembling the flight of dark birds innumerable." "They are the clods cast upward from the swift hoofs of their war-steeds," answered St. Patrick. Then, through the mist, emerge the champions of the Red Branch, and, conspicuous above all, the form of the immense hero, Cuculain, borne in his magic war-chariot, guided by Læg, armed as the bards ever described him, and drawn by the Liath Macha and black Shanglan, sweeping over the plain like a shadow along the slopes of some mountain range. In the ensuing interview Cuculain utters these words: "I am he who was called the Hound of Ulla. I was not a Hound for the guarding of cattle, but a Hound for the protection of territories and the defence of nations."

I have said it is the profound and vital humanity of his career, even more than his greatness, which touches and stirs the reader. We see him as a little boy,*

* His mother refused to allow him to go, but the boy hearing that Slieve Fuad, now the Fewa mountain, near Newtown-Hamilton, Co. Armagh, lay

with his sword of lath and toy shield, escaping by night from his mother's palace, eager to commence his warlike education under his uncle at Emain Macha; not creeping like snail unwillingly to school, but with his little brazen hurle driving hockey-balls before him, casting forward his toy javelin and running to catch it ere it fell, overflowing with eagerness and hope. We see him downcast and gloomy at the thought of leaving his comrades and his games, though invited by the High King and the great Knights of Ulla to feast along with them.* We see him knighted, the wild wayward boy, exerting his terrible strength before the hosts of Ulla, smashing the offered war-chariots and breaking the best weapons into fragments. We mark now he confounded† the great champion

between Dán Dalgán (Dundalk) and Emain Macha, escaped by night, making this mountain his sign-post. Slieve Fuad was a sacred mountain and steeped in mythical traditions. The bare fact that it is mentioned at all, in connection with Cuculain, is proof to me, recognizing the genius of the literature, that it was believed to be one of the haunted mountains in his post-mortal career. When he reached Emain Macha, Concoobar and Fergus mac Roy were playing chess under the trees of the lawn.

* Concoobar and the Knights proceeding to a feast given by Culain the Smith invite the boy to join them. Setanta refuses till the game of hockey is finished. Arriving after dark at the house of the Smith, he is attacked by a huge dog which he slays with his hurle. The Smith laments over his faithful dog, but Setanta promises to perform the duties of the dog until another equally good is procured; hence his surname Cu-Culain, the Hound of Culain.

† Having procured his first war-chariot and weapons, Cuculain compelled his charioteer to drive south into Mid-Erin, that he might signalize his taking of arms by slaying some of the enemies of his country. On the frontier he is pursued by Conaill Carna, who is guarding the border, and who desires to turn him back. Cuculain, with a stone, breaks the chariot-pole of Conaill. The hero is rolled out in the dust, and the boy looks back, laughing, and taunts him with his rotten chariot gear, and so goes forward into the enemies' country. At the point where the Mattock meets the Boyne, was the Dán of three wizard champions, sons of Nectan. These he slays in single combat, and returns to Emain Macha with their heads. At this point, upon the

Conaill Carna, and laughed back at him discomfited, going southwards alone to wet his weapons in the blood of southern enemies, his chivalrous modesty* and innocence when the naked queens bar his mad path against Emain Macha, his defeat and contumely when Curoi † mac Dary cut off his long war-like tresses, after which, with boyish vanity and shame, he retired into lonely places in the North. His love for Emer, ‡ and the hope long deferred, his education in the isle§ of Skye under northern warrioresses,

Boyme, there still stands the ancient tumulus of the sons of Nectan, a beautiful grassy mound, sloping downwards to the Boyme. Knowing the genius of the literature, I confidently expected to find a mound at this place, and was not disappointed.

* A madness descends on him when he sees Emain Macha, and he designs its destruction. By the advice of Cathvah the Druid, naked women are set before him, seeing whom, he is confused and distressed, so that the warriors capture and disarm him. Cuculain was liable to the Berserker rage.

† He accompanies Curoi mac Dary to the conquest of the Isle of Man. There he loves Blana, daughter of the King, also loved by Curoi. The maiden returns the love of Cuculain. Curoi mac Dary defeats and overpowers Cuculain, who was then but a stripling, and carries off Blana to his fortress in the west of Kerry—Cathair Conroi—still in existence. Cuculain, when his hair was grown, slays Curoi mac Dary, and brings away Blana to the North. The bard of Curoi follows them, and, seizing Blana, springs with her over a lofty cliff into the sea. It was the son of this Curoi mac Dary, Lewy mac Conroi, who, along with Erc, and assisted by the supernatural aid of the sons of Cailitin, afterwards slew the hero.

In another tale, this Curoi mac Dary is represented as rising out of the sea, like some elemental genius.

‡ This was his wife. Emer's father refused leave for the marriage, stating that Cuculain had not completed his education. It was after this that he went to Scotland. Hence his appearance in the Scotch traditions, and in the Ossian of Macpherson. After his return the father was still inexorable. Cuculain bore her away from Lusk, Co. Dublin, her native place, to Dún Dalgan (Dundalk), defeating all who attempted to bar his progress. When Cuculain first saw Emer, she was sitting on the lawn of her father's Dún, teaching embroidery to young girls, her pupils.

§ The Amazonian Queen of the island was Scathach, pronounced Skyah, whence Skye. When Dr. Johnson and Boswell visited the island, they were shown a well of clear delicious water, called Cucullin's well. In Macpherson

and the strong friendship there formed with Fardia the great Fir-bolgic champion, his wars against Queen Meave, when deserted and alone, wetting nightly his sylvan couch with his tears ; in single combats, ceaseless, ever renewed, he barred the gates of the North against the four* provinces of Erin ; his strife with Fardia, the most profoundly tragic scene in all literature, and his lamentations over his slain friend ; his reappearance, as if from death, at the battle of Gaura, bound with bandages and sick with wounds, when he led the beaten Red Branch to victory, sweeping the armies of Queen Meave across the Shannon ; his battles over all Erin, labour and suffering unceasing in the cause of his nation, the thick coming omens of approaching doom, the broken *geise*,† the singing of the weird god‡ of death, the weeping of all the queens of Ulla for his impending fall, the return of the Clan Caillitin§ armed with all the powers of hell and darkness to effect his overthrow, the departure of the Red Branch, and Cuculain once more on the plains of Murthemney resisting the Four Provinces, and through that last red battle his pupil and protégé advancing

the name is always so spelled. In their tour, a Highland lady repeated for them a poem descriptive of Cuculain's two war-steeds, which shows, that there were, even then, in Scotland, genuine traditions of the heroic age of the Gæl.

* See chap. ii. in this Part.

† See p. 194.

‡ *Æd of the Golden Harp*. It was foretold that he should hear him.

§ Cuculain had slain the enchanter, Caillitin. By the direction of Caillitin Queen Meave maimed his six children, lest they should depart from the study of magic arts and become warriors. They spent their lives learning enchantments, and, returning to Erin, induced Queen Meave to invade Ulster once more. It was with enchanted weapons, furnished by them, that Ere and Lewy mac Curoi slew the hero.

against him already overwhelmed with numbers, and then the end—Cúculain dying, having made himself fast to a tall pillar-stone, “that he might not die in his sitting or lying, but that he might die in his standing” while his blood ran down to the lake,* where the unconscious otter lapped up the noblest blood in all the land. Through his whole career, in war and peace, in the world and out of it, in spite of all the cold dictates of reason and logic, the heart of the reader is stirred and his imagination inflamed by the contemplation of all that terrible and superhuman heroism, and the knowledge of those deep wells of pity, tenderness, and love, whence sprang those gentle deeds and words which, even more than his heroism, go to the formation of the noblest character ever presented in literature.†

CHAPTER II.

HISTORY OF ULSTER, *TEMPORE* CÚCULAIN.

A RAPID superficial sketch of the character and chief personages of an age so remarkable will be desirable at this point—a sketch unencumbered with many names

* Loch an Tanaigé, about five miles south-west of Dundalk. I believe the Lake and stone still exist.

† So extraordinary is the gentle and chivalrous side of Cúculain's character that Crowe, an eminent Irish scholar, was led to suggest that the whole Cúculainian epos was recast in the post-Patrician centuries, with the object of investing the hero with the most remarkable attributes of our Lord himself. It is, however, certain that the gentler side of the heroic age issues from the pre-Christian ages side by side with the strong.

or minutiae for which the more curious inquirer must consult the authorities or those books in which I have endeavoured epically to set forth what I here cursorily glance over.

At first, Fergus mac Roy was king of Ulster; but by stratagem, or by a cabal of the chieftains, was supplanted, and his cousin Concobar mac Nessa installed in his place. Thus, Concobar is king of the north of Ireland during the whole floruit of his nephew Cuculain. Fergus, however, a hero of a large tolerant nature, still dwells amongst the Red Branch, one of their greatest champions. In one bardic scene we perceive him and his cousin, the youthful Concobar, seated under the trees of the lawn at Emain Macha, playing a game of chess,* while, hard by, the boys of the military school of Ulster are exercising themselves at goal.

It was at this time that Cuculain came to the school, and Fergus took upon himself the martial tuition of the boy.†

Finally, Fergus rose in rebellion against Concobar, impelled to that step by a great personal wrong. Concobar loved a beautiful girl named Deirdré, to whom, according to some, he was married. She, however, eloped to Scotland with Naysi, the eldest of

* Chess was one of the favourite amusements of the time. All we know of it is that it consisted of a board and men, the moving of whom determined the game. Skill at chess was an heroic accomplishment. I think that originally there was more in it than seems, and that it was connected with druidic mysteries.

† Cuculain, a little boy, stole away from his mother at Dundalk, to Emain Macha, and suddenly joined the young princes in their sports. They endeavoured to drive him away, but Cuculain dispersed them all with his hurle.

three great champions of the age, sons of Usna. This Naysi is described as having a skin white as snow, hair like the plumage of the raven, and a voice resonant as the surge of deep waters ; while Deirdré was the most beautiful of all the women of ancient Ireland—golden-haired, her voice sweeter than the harp.

Finally, the brothers, with Deirdré, returned into Erin under a deceitful promise from the king and under the pledged protection of Fergus mac Roy. Concobar, however, broke through the protection of Fergus, and his warriors slew the sons of Usna. Deirdré herself died of grief and shame at being made the subject of a ribald jest. There is a poem attributed to her with these lines :—

“O man, who diggest the grave, make it deep and wide,
I too shall sleep on the bosom of my love.”

Cuculain seems to have been then a boy ; but he is represented as meeting Deirdré and comforting her. He, however, never faltered in his allegiance to his uncle, Concobar mac Nessa.

Fergus now rebels ; is joined by Cormac Conlingas, the king's son, half a dozen conspicuous champions, and by a great portion of Ulster. After this, a terrible war, in which Emain Macha is burned ; but finally, Fergus mac Roy and his faction are driven out of the north, chiefly by the great prowess of Conaill Carna. He and his friends fly into Connaught, where they enter military service with Queen Meave and her husband, Aileel Mór, king of Connaught. At the commencement of the great epical war between Queen Meave and the Ultonians, Fergus was her chief warrior and the captain of her host.

Queen Meave now takes up the quarrel of the great exile, and forms a coalition of the whole of Ireland against Ulster ; though the pretext of the war was, that the Ultonians refused to lend her the Black Bull of Coonalney—a legendary druidic beast having a human soul in the body of a quadruped, and a voice filling the territory with a delicious music, of terrible size and strength, the “black jewel” of the Ultonians.

At the date of this invasion which has been chronicled in the year 2 A.D., the great champions of the Ultonians were afflicted with a magic stupor,* so that they were without sense or strength. Thus, a field is made clear for Cuculain on which to exert his terrible prowess.

As the host of Queen Meave go on towards Ulster, they find their stragglers and marauding parties cut off as though some mysterious malign influence preceded them. Near the Boyne, the chariots and horses of two of their greatest champions gallop madly into the camp with the headless trunks of the champions and their charioteers strapped into their places. The same day, reaching the Boyne, they find a tree planted in the midst of the river bearing a ghastly trophy—the four heads of the slain men fixed upon the pointed prongs.

“I know not who can be doing these things,” said Fergus, “if it be not my little pupil Setanta, the son of Sualtam.”

But doubts are set at rest. A twig-hoop,† fresh

* *Vide* p. 114, the curse of Macha.

† Fergus thus explains the Ogham :—

“It is the work of a Hero whose anger is roused,
The Hound of the South in the Crave Rue ;
'Tis the knot of a champion, not the tie of a fool ;
It is his name that is in the ring.”—*Hermathens*, vol. v., p. 225.

cut, is brought to Fergus with the name of Cuculain written upon it in Ogham, fastened round a pillar-stone by the young hero himself.

Now, Cuculain attacks the invaders by night with his magic sling, slaying hundreds. Himself, the swiftest of Meave's warriors cannot overtake.

Finally, through the influence of Fergus whom he loves, Cuculain makes a formal compact with Meave that he will cease from slinging and from his irregular and nocturnal slaughter, if she will undertake not to cross the river Dee invading Ulster, until he shall be subdued in single combat.

The compact is made ; and, at what is now called Ardee,* in the County of Louth, day by day, Cuculain met and slaughtered the bravest and most renowned warriors of all that age ; but no help arrives, and the hero grows every day more exhausted.

His father, Sualtam, has been despatched to arouse the Red Branch, but in vain ; and the hero not

This occurs in a tale occurring in an MS. of the eleventh century—when epicised no one knows. The metrical portions are, of course, the more ancient. In this and similar passages, we see that the Ogham is as intimately associated with Cuculain as is the war-chariot ; but the war-chariot can be shown to have been an historical feature of the century (see Part ii., chap. 2) ; therefore, the inference is probable that the Ogham, too, belonged to the age in which those personages flourished who have been converted into the semi-mythical champions of the Red Branch. Dr. Graves, Bishop of Limerick, is inclined to admit even as high an antiquity to the Irish Ogham. (See *Hermathene*, vol. v.)

How incomparably more archaic is the Irish than the Teutonic heroic literature, is shown by a comparison of what I have above stated, with the admitted fact that the *Nibelungenlied* was actually *composed* only in the twelfth century.

* The remains of giant tumuli still exist at this spot. Indeed, all the tumuli in this portion of Ireland and which belonged to personages more ancient than Cuculain, were believed to have been raised over heroes slain by him.

knowing the cause, is dejected and deems himself forsaken. Nevertheless, he fights on without yielding. At last, the most potent warrior of the south of Ireland, Lōk, comes out against him, assisted by the Mōr Reega, the war-goddess ; but after a terrible struggle, Cuculain slays Lōk and wounds the goddess. In this combat he was himself sore wounded, and his two black-birds* slain ; and that night he lifted up his voice in the forest, lamenting his desertion and the conspiracy of all men against him.

The next hero brought out against Cuculain was an ancient friend and ally, Fardia, son of Daman, of Firbolg race, who had been his school-fellow in the isle of Skye. Indeed, Cuculain at that school seems to have been Fardia's "fag," polishing his armour and tying up his spears. Fardia, by great bribes and through a promise given in intoxication, and perhaps, too, from his believing that Cuculain would retreat at his command, is induced to come out against the northern champion ; so, Cuculain, with difficulty enduring his wounds and his deserted and forsaken condition, is now suddenly confronted by his old and dearest friend.

After a passionate colloquy, ensues a tremendous strife, during which the water of the Avon Dia holds back for fear. The war-steeds of the host of Meave fly terrified, and the women and camp-followers break forth south-westward. The invincible Cuculain slays Fardia ; but afterwards weeps and mourns over the dead body of his friend.

* There is some weird druidic idea contained here, the clue to which has been lost.

All this time, too, Cuculain seems to have been subject to the wizard charms of a weird being called Cailitin,* a druid of Queen Meave; therefore, fights with only half his strength.

After the last duel, Cuculain does not come forth again. Queen Meave and the great host of the four provinces invade Ulster and plunder the whole province. Retiring, however, they are overtaken on the plain of Gaura,† in Westmeath, by the quick-journeying champions of the Red Branch—now aroused from their fatal stupor. Concealed in a weird mist filled with fires and lights, the flashing of chariots and swords, amid which, too, is seen the Red Hand of Ulster, the banner‡ of the north, descend the Clanna Rury, Concobar mac Nessa and his knights upon the retreating host of Meave.

In the ensuing battle the Red Branch are beaten and all but exterminated, when Cuculain reappears, at first weak and bound with bandages; but ere long, apparently by the aid of the god, Lu, his father, he recovers his strength and goes out to battle in his war-chariot with Læg by his side, surrounded by tutelary gods and demons of slaughter, his form exaggerated through mists of terror—not now as Cuculain militant, but invulnerable and invincible like a god. Before

* It was not until Cuculain slew Cailitin that he became invincible. After that nothing could stop him. His death, however, was eventually brought about by the sons and daughters of Cailitin.

† This plain seems to have been not far from Lough Ennel.

‡ Then for the first time, sang the bard, was that banner brought forth, and it was never seen in Erin any more. In all the heroic literature, there are these strange ideas suggesting the existence of a deeper and stranger literature upon which that we know has been formed. This I regard as certain, that the more ancient the literature the better, and the more modern the worse. What it gains in polish it loses in depth and sublimity.

him he sweeps the whole Meavian host westward to the Shannon, and at Athlone set up trophy-stones, smitten with his sword from adjoining hills.

Be it remarked, however, that true to his nature, when Meave's host is thoroughly beaten, Cuculain himself protects her retreat and saves her flying warriors from the vengeance of the pursuers.

This great termagant of the west, Queen Meave, has a counterpart in the same or immediately succeeding ages in the east, in Leinster, called Meave the Half-Red, who suffered no king to reign in Tara who did not make her his bride.

The western or Connaught Meave, however, was by far the most renowned. She is described as having yellow hair and a pale face. She went out to battle like a man of war, bearing spear and shield. A wounded knight in the presence of Cuculain describes how a tall woman with golden hair and a pale face came through the battle and discharged her spear against him. "I know that woman well," replied Cuculain, "it was Meave of Cruhane; and I myself would have fallen at her hands had I not fled." There is no account preserved anywhere, even in the tale from which this passage is taken, of the flight of Cuculain before Meave. On the contrary, Meave is always represented as being in the direst fear of the northern champion. In one place, at sight of him, she cowers beneath her shield; in another, springs down from her chariot and flies; and in a third, collapses, utterly panic-stricken* and overwhelmed with abject terror.

* *Hinc lacus magni Midie Occidentalis, i.e., of Westmeath.*

CHAPTER III.

GREATER CHAMPIONS OF THE RED BRANCH.

ROUND Cuculain revolve a host of lesser heroes as compared with him, not stars of the first magnitude, but still of heroic chivalry and courage, and super-human size and beauty. In the great war just referred to, the Ultonians awake out of their stupefaction, or, more probably, if there be, as is likely, a historical substratum of the whole epic, combine and act in concert after the injuries wreaked upon all. The hosting of the Red Branch is held at Slemain, in Meath, the descendants of Rury holding territory, at this time extending well into that province. A grand picture is given of the gathering of the Ultonian clans, gigantic warriors, glittering with gold, silver, and polished brass, with fluttering brattas, scarlet, blue, and purple, marching from the North to the green hill of Slemain, when the Red Hand of Ulster, woven by immortal hands, on a ground snow-white, floats aloft above the head of their mighty captain, Con-cobar mac Nessa, Ard-Rie of all Ulla, the chivalry and giantry of the heroic age, having something of the same weird vastness which characterizes the great Council of Satan, as imagined by the English poet. Through all rudeness of thought and extravagance of diction, we cannot fail to be aware of the note of sublimity which sounds through all, and of the heroic thought and temper with which the whole is instinct. One by one the great Champions of the North are described, at times vividly and minutely, at times

loosely and vaguely, with hoarse-resounding adjectives. But as we wander through the rest of the cyclic literature of the age, all these heroes, and many others, grow definitely and distinctly before the imagination, each with his peculiar attributes and proper history and antecedents.

Concobar mac Nessa is their Captain, son by Nessa of Factna the Righteous, King of all Erin, and son of Rury the Great, founder of the Ultonian nation. On that green mound of Slemain he stands visible from afar, clear seen like a royal tower on the crest of some tall hill. Bearded he, unlike the warriors of the age, for, in this resembling the best of the Irish Kings, he united the attributes of the bard with those of the warrior. The chief stain on his character is the treacherous slaughter of the sons of Usna, but then, Concobar loved Deirdré, and it was one of his own Knights who had so wronged him.

The best proof of his greatness is the loyalty of Cuculain and Conaill Carna, the two great Champions of the Province. Cuculain's last words were, "Give my benediction to my uncle, Concobar mac Nessa, and to all the Ultonians, and tell him and them that I guarded the frontier of Ulla until I was slain."

The manner of his death will be described further on. In the cycle he stands out as the conspicuous monarch of the age the type of a heroic king. His voice is described as awful and regal, his face white and ruddy, his eyes dark blue, and his stature gigantic.

The tomb of Concobar was at Tara in the middle ages, its site identified by Petrie, but it has since disappeared. Before his time the Ultonians buried their dead at Tailteen. His mother, Nessa, and his nephew,

Cuculain, were also interred at Tara. The tombs of the latter were what was termed *tredumas*, i.e., a triple circumvallation surrounding the central cairn.

These raths, however, were not altogether tombs. They were temples, within and around which the great Cuculain and his relatives were worshipped with rites, which I fear have passed beyond recall.

It is recorded of Concobar mac Nessa, that during his reign the bards of Ireland were persecuted by the aristocracy, and that, to them, flying before the wrath of the nobles, he supplied shelter and a refuge in the North. As I do not regard the age as historic, I assign no more importance to this statement than that it reveals what certainly was one of the facts of the pre-Christian centuries, i.e., that in the bardic class the nobles found a powerful and troublesome bulwark of popular rights and freedom of thought and criticism.

There is also a fine bardic tale representing a learned contest between two bards in the presence of Concobar, who was so perplexed and annoyed at their archaic terminology, that he enacted its surrender, and the substitution of vernacular phraseology. We have here a reflection of what, no doubt, was perpetually taking place, viz., a periodical compulsion brought to bear upon bardic pedantry and conservatism, especially in the legal province of their intellectual domain.

I may here remark that the age of the original composition of any bardic tale or poem cannot be determined from the character of its language. The form changed from century to century, varying with every new redaction, while the substance remained unaltered. The only conscious alteration which can be

discovered, is the expansion into glowing rhetorical prose in the later forms of the literature of some simple epithets and descriptions in the originals, but the names, characters, incidents, and vital meanings are untouched.

That the tales were composed and reached a fixed form at a time when the pagan mounds, raths, and cathairs were still sacred, frequented, and well known, take the following example : Cuculain, Conaill Carna, and Lægairey Buada, the three great northern champions, went southwards and took up their quarters in the fortress of Curoi mac Dary. Curoi was then absent in distant parts of the world, but the heroes watched in turn nightly for his return, occupying one of the two gate-houses. One night as Lægairey Buada watched, he saw a man walking across the sea between whose legs a ship might sail, and in his hand a bundle of oak-trees, cut each with a single chopping, any one of which it would take six oxen to draw ; as he neared he flung the oak-trees* at Lægairey. This was Curoi mac Dary, whom Cuculain afterwards slew.

In another portion of the same tale, a serpent with the mane of a horse, rises out of the lake hard by the fortress and assails the heroes.

In a different tale there is an account of a river flowing out of this fortress, called the White Stream.

Now, if Irish topography had been lost, these tales would have been regarded as a mere imagination of idle persons, having no deeper meaning ; but we now know

* This was, doubtless to account for some adjoining oak-forest. Not the smallest item of these ancient tales but subserved some purpose. Where they fell, for the hero dodged them, the oak-forest grew.

that Curoi's Cathair is Cahir Conroi, a cyclopean structure of immense* extent, on the Slieve Mish range, beyond Tralee, and perched upon the very edge of a steep cliff overhanging the sea, and the two gate-houses are still in existence opposite the wide entrance. The lake, indeed, is dry, but the soil, a cut-away bog, shows that it must have been there once, and the stream that runs down the hill side is still called the Fin-glas, or White-stream. Here, too, is a place of giant stones, still called Cuculain's house, and a valley—the Valley of the Stable, where the great champion stabled his giant steeds, and where weird neighings are heard at night, according to local fairy lore.

Conaill Carna, Conaill the Victorious, son of Amergin, the dear friend and avenger of Cuculain. He made a mutual vow of vengeance with Cuculain. Said Conaill: "The sun shall not set on the day thou art slain, O Setanta, ere I shall have avenged thee." "Thy blood shall not be cold upon the earth, O Conaill, when I shall have taken vengeance for thee," answered Cuculain. When Fergus mac Roy was driven out of Ulster, Conaill became the tutor and instructor of Cuculain; but soon the pupil outstripped his master. It was he and Lægairey the Triumphant who brought Cuculain into Alba to be educated by the Queen of Skye.

Of immense stature and broad shoulders, over which

* The walls at the top are fourteen feet thick, and below where the ledge, which runs round these cathairs on the inner side begins, are twenty-two. Some of the stones of this wall are fourteen feet long. It is, probably, one of the greatest of the kind in Europe.

This Curoi was the great southern marine genius, corresponding to Manann amongst the northern Irish, the Picts and the Britons.

rolled long golden tresses, which shorn, would fill a reaping-basket, he was yet the handsomest hero* of the age, white as snow, and ruddy. Without a murmur, when once it was fully proved, he yielded to the surpassing greatness of the boy-champion whom he had taught, and by whom he was destined to be shorn of his own glory.

Innumerable battles he fought in Meath and Leinster. One of these, at the Hill of Howth, produced results mingling intimately with the progress of the cycle. Athairney the Importunate, Ard-ollav or Chief-poet of Ulster, traversed the South of Ireland, appearing in succession at the Dúns of all the Kings, and, as he left each demanded of him that which to him was most precious. All yielded to his demands, fearing the vengeance of the terrible Red Branch. At length he concluded his circuit, and returning by the Liffey, and where Dublin now stands, he erected a bridge of timber, that with his possessions he might cross into Bregia, then the territory of the Red Branch. From this circumstance, the town now called Dublin, was named Bally-Ath-a-Cliah, the town of the ford or bridge of hurdles.

The Chief King of North Leinster at this time was Mesgoera, who having fulfilled all duties of hospitality and of respect to bards in the person of Athairney during his stay, no sooner found him gone than he with

* In one passage there is this barbaric description of him : One cheek white as snow, the other red as the foxglove; one eye blue as the violet, the other black as the back of the cock-shafer. It is strange that Victor Hugo in his description of the Duchess Josiana, purporting to be the most perfect realization of physical beauty, represents one of her eyes as blue and the other black.

his warriors crossed the Liffey, and attacked and defeated the poet and his retinue. These defeated entrenched themselves on the hill of Howth, and despatched messengers to Emain Macha. Ere long, Conaill Carna and the Ultonians descended out of Ulster, raised the siege of Howth, defeated the Leinster army, and, pursuing them across the Liffey, slew Mesgeera at the ford of Clæn.* The brains of Mesgeera, according to one of the barbarous customs of the time, which, ever and anon, blot with their horror the purity and chivalrousness which characterize the age, were mingled with clay and formed into a hard ball which was afterwards preserved in the treasury at Emain Macha as a trophy and proof of what was considered one of Conail Carna's greatest achievements. This ball was subsequently stolen from Emain Macha by two fools, and taken from them by Cet, son of Magah, the greatest of the Connaught Champions, and, after Cuculain, the strongest and bravest Champion of the age. With this ball,† that Cet struck and slew Concobar mac Nessa in the battle of Ardanurchar, Co. Westmeath.

* A ford of the Liffey, near Naas. A cairn or rath will certainly be found here if it has not been destroyed. Conaill also slew a great western hero, named Belcu. His tomb, at Belcoo, was destroyed in the year 1880, by railway contractors.

† Concobar, according to a wild mediæval legend, carried this ball in his head to his dying day. At the time of the crucifixion, they said, Conaill Carna was present, and, returning, described the scene to Concobar. Concobar in a fury rushed forth, and imagining that he was slaughtering the Jews and Romans, hewed down a wood near his palace. But, in his frenzy, the ball started forth, and he died.

The few Christian additions to the bardic literature are all easily separable like this. They are clumsily joined on, and do not affect the essence of the narrative.

The following is another example :

After their death, Cuculain and Læg, journeying to Fairy-land, pause over

Conaill Carna was the most faithful of the Knights of Concobar mac Nessa. When the sons of Usna fought for their lives at Emain Macha, Concobar lent his arms, including his shield, to Fiechra, one of his own sons. Naysi, however, ^{acted as if} pressed hard upon him, going nigh to slay. Then, the magic shield of Concobar, haunted by the sea-spirit, Tiobal, roared a note of warning, and the three Royal* waves of Erin roared responsive. Conaill Carna was then at Dûn Sovarchy, and he heard the wave of Toth roaring. "Truly," said Conaill, "Concobar is in danger, and it is not meet that I should remain here listening." Straightway he armed himself, and crossed Ulster to the assistance of his King. In the great war waged immediately after this between Concobar mac Nessa and the rebel princes under Fergus mac Roy, Conaill is the great champion and bulwark of the sovereignty of Concobar. When Cuculain was overpowered and slain by the Meavian host in Murthemney, it was Conaill who led the Red Branch to avenge him.† At Tara, then, he slew in single combat, Erc, the son of Cairbry Nia-far, who was one of those concerned in the death of the Hero. Erc's left arm was injured in the fight, and Conaill directed his own left arm to be strapped to his side, that the fairness of the battle might be restored.‡ At Arget Ros, on the Nore, he slew Lewy mac Con-roi,

the city of Emain Macha, and prophesy the coming reign of Christ.

This Cet was one of the greatest champions of the age, but in the literature I have read his personality is not very distinct.

* For these, see Part vi., chap. 4.

† This tale is called the Red Route of Conaill Carna in vengeance of Cuculain.

‡ Examples of such chivalrousness are very frequent in the Cuculainian literature,

i.e., Lewy, son of Curoi mac Dary, who, along with Erc, had* slain the Hero.

Subsequently, he invaded Connaught, where he slew the great Fergus† mac Roy, by the shore of Lough Ree, but retreating thence into Ulster, he was met by those three Red Horsemen, the instruments of Fate and Nemesis; and Conaill of the Victories at last experienced defeat and death.

The respective prowess of Cuculain and Conaill may be illustrated by the following story: Cuculain, Conaill, and Lægairey contended at casting the wheel, perhaps the quoit, but evidently one of great size. Lægairey cast it to a distance which astonished the household of Meave; Conaill, however, far exceeded his cast, but Cuculain doubled that of Conaill.‡

Through his son, Euryal Glun-mar, he was ancestor§

* This was son of Curoi mac Dary, for whom, see last chapter.

† There was a mediæval legend of how the epic of the Tán-bo-Cooalney was lost, and how a company of bards and saints prayed and fasted over the tomb of Fergus. Finally, Fergus rose out of his tomb, and related the history of the great war between Queen Meave and Ulster.

‡ Aileel Mór and Meave, on that occasion, presented Lægairey with a goblet of brass, having a lip of findruiney, some white preparation of brass, not clearly explained; Conaill Carna, with one of silver, having a lip of ruddy gold; but, to Cuculain, they gave a goblet of pure gold with a lip of flashing diamond.—See Bricind's Feast, R.I.A.

§ Also, of the Hy-Conaill, i.e., the Children of Conaill, in historic times inhabiting the county of Louth.

Take too, this scene. After the slaughter of Conairy Mór, Conaill returns to his father's palace at Tailteen, half his shield gone, his sword broken, and his two spears shattered and "in brass." His father meets him at the door with a stern aspect: "Thou wentest quicker than the hounds which chased thee, my son. Is the Lord alive?" "No, father," said Conaill. "He is without his head at Bruidin Da Derga." "No Champion," answered the sire, "leaves alive a field where his Lord lies dead." Conaill answered by throwing back his bratta, and showed his shield arm hacked through to the bone, and the marks where many arrows had gone through his hand,

of the subsequent Kings of the Red Branch, and through his son, Leix Land-mōr, of the ruling families of Leix, a kingdom which comprised the King's and Queen's Counties. In the character of Cuculain there is something weird and spiritual and a profound pathos, which are absent in that of his friend Conaill.

Lægairey of the Triumphs, is the third of the great trio; but the limited amount of the literature which is open to me precludes a description as full as may be desired. In the tales in which the personality of the other two heroes stands out clearly, Lægairey, though always easily third and far beyond the rest, is yet seldom alluded to in particular terms. He is usually introduced along with them; but his personality is not so distinct. His father was Conud, of whom I know little, and his grandfather Iliach, of whom there is one beautiful story recorded. When Cuculain was defending the passage of the Dee at the ford of Ardee, all the rest of the Red Branch, plunged in a fatal stupor, did not stir from their Dûns. Iliach was now an aged warrior living in a remote Dûn; but when he heard of the jeopardy of Cuculain, he at once brought in his old war-steeds—weak with age and lazy with fat, yoked them to the decayed and rotten chariot, took his dilapidated shield and his spears—whose heads rattled on the decayed spear-trees, and set forth at once to his assistance; his people, apparently mere clowns, putting into the chariot, stones to be cast at the foe. In his futile courage and enthusiasm, there is a blended pathos and

and showed him his sword arm swollen to twice its usual size. Then the old man relaxed his lowering visage, and said: "That arm has done good work to-day, my son."—From the *Bruidin Da Derga*, *Leabar na-h-Uidhre*.

beauty. He is, of course, slain by the mighty men of Meave. His sword, apparently no very serviceable weapon, he requests his slayers to send to his grandson Lægairey.

The death of Lægairey is the most characteristic thing recorded concerning him. Æd, son of Anind, proffered love to the wife of Conobar, the high queen of Ulster. For this offence he was condemned to death by drowning. The executioners brought the bard to the lake, hard by which was the Dûn of Lægairey, who, starting forth in rage to rescue the poet, struck his forehead against the lintel of his palace and was thus slain.

While Cuculain was still a boy, Lægairey as well as Conaill, watched over and educated him. It was he and Conaill who conducted him to the isle of Skye.

Cormac Conlingas was the son of Conobar, and far beyond his brothers in renown. He was associated with Fergus mac Roy in the expedition into Alba to bring back the sons of Usna, and after their slaughter, rose in rebellion against his father. He was driven out of Ulster along with Fergus, and after him shared the confidence, while he seems to have chiefly attracted the admiration of Queen Meave. In the hosting at Rath Cruhane, she is represented as watching eagerly for his arrival. His equipment and that of his warriors was superior to that of all the Meavian host. His lena or tunic is noticed as descending below his knees.

In the battle of Gaura, Fergus mac Roy meets and overpowers the king of Ulster; but Cormac, though he had rebelled against his father, now rushes through the battle to save his life,

His wife was Essa, daughter of Eocha Airem.* Her tomb, Rath Essa, was raised on a high ground commanding an extensive view. "Bury me," said Essa, "where I can see the Hill of Howth, and the Hill of Tara, and Tailteen."

In the Bruidin of Da Derga,† we find Cormac with nine comrades, hostages to Conairy Mōr, for the fidelity of the Ultonians. He is there described as an immense and proud champion; his eyes full of light and fire; his countenance broad above and narrow below; his teeth well set and regular; ruddy-faced and with hair like unto flax. Beside him, its head plunged in an urn of lethean drugs, is the fiery living spear of Pisarr which Lu Lam-fáda, the god, had caused the sons of Turenn to bring for him into Erin.

His death, too, is characteristic. After the decease of his father, Concobar mac Nessa, he sets out to return to Ulster, expecting to be elected to the Ard-Rieship of the province. On the way he turns aside to the Dún of a harper named Cravetheena, whose wife he loved. The harper returning and witnessing their love, plays a magic melody, at sound of which all in the Dún are lulled to slumber.‡ Then he set fire to the palace, and Cormac, his paramour, and the whole household were consumed in the flames.

Furbey the Cæsarean, another son of Concobar, was so called from the manner of his birth, he having

* R. H.—See p. 190.

† See Part viii., chap. 3.

‡ This magic power is often alluded to. Lara of the Ships, one in my dry list of kings, thus slew Covac Cael-Bray. His harper played around the palace of Tuam Tenba on the Nore, lulling to sleep Covac Cael-Bray and his warriors. Then Lara invaded the Dún and slew Covac and thirty feudatory kings.—See Keatings.

been cut out from the womb of his dead mother Einey, who was drowned in the river, which, from her, was called the Inny. He is chiefly renowned as the slayer of Queen Meave—the implacable enemy of his nation. While she bathed at Inis Clohra in Lough Ree, he cast a stone at her out of his sling from the eastern shore of the lake, slaying the great heroine. Cuculain, be it remembered, had on several occasions spared the life of this termagant.

Furbey is the third sling-armed warrior of ancient Irish story; the first being Lu Lam-fáda, the god, and the second, Cuculain. Firēba, a prince not over-warlike, of the Meavian host, alone, so far as I know, fought with a bow and arrows. It will be remembered that in the Iliad, the bow-men are all second-rate heroes. On the other hand, in Irish heroic story, stone-casting, as in the Iliad, is honourable. In the rebellion* of Bras, Nar and Lothar against their father, Eocha the Melancholy, it is recorded that not a champion came to the hosting of the rebel princes without a warrior's hand-stone fitted in the hollow of his shield. In the Iliad, the casting of stones plays a great part; but Homer seems to represent these missiles as having been found accidentally by the warriors. I would, however, suggest, that in the antique literature from which Homer evidently wrought in constructing his epic, the stone formed part of the warrior's equipment, but that he overlooked it, if in fact, all definite allusions to it had not fallen out of the literature in his time.†

* Part viii., chap. 1.

† I agree with those who assign a late origin to the Iliad. It was written, I am convinced, by a highly cultivated literary man living in an age of

Cuculain is in one passage represented as casting stones against the host of Meave, until they were like cattle in a pen maddened by the gad-fly.

Fergus mac Roy is the most colossal figure of the age. While yet a member of the Red Branch, there is in his personality a huge carelessness and confidence generated by his immense strength and power and the affectionateness of his temper. He was king of Ulster before Concobar; and though tricked out of the sovereignty by his cousin or by a cabal of the chieftains, still lives amongst the Ultonians—not caring for official superiority. When Concobar asks who will go into Alba to bring back the sons of Usna,* Fergus, though he is aware of the hostile intentions of Concobar, answers at once that he will go: "for," said he, "I well know that there is not a king or champion in all Ireland who would break through my protection." In this, however, he was mistaken. When his ship sailed into the harbour on whose shore was the Dûn of the brothers, he lifted his voice of thunder and the brothers† heard it.

In his history we have another example of the *geis*, or druidic prohibition. It was forbidden to Fergus to refuse any invitation to a feast.‡

advanced civilization. The real Homer lived in some prehistoric bardic age, supplying a name for all such compositions. Nearly all the Irish poetry relating to Finn and his heroes is put into the mouth of Ossian; but of Ossian himself we have not a line. Had a great mediæval poem been written about Finn, it, like all the others, would have been handed down as the work of Ossian.

* See p. 210.

† Deirdre heard it too, and endeavoured in vain to deceive the brothers. In all such stories the protecting divining part is ascribed to the woman. See also the story of the children of Lir.

‡ It was a *geis* to Cuculain that he should be awaked from slumber.

When defeated in battle and driven out of the north by Concobar and his knights, he reappears west of the Shannon—a tower of strength in the province of Meave and a pillar of her sovereignty. He, though an exile, took forthwith command of her warriors and crushed all opposition against her in that province, fixing her rule on many recalcitrant nations.* In the invasion of Ulster by Queen Meave, we find him her mightiest champion and the captain of her armies—ever restraining the petulance and arrogance of the queen. He many times predicts the terrible slaughter which will be wreaked upon her host by Cuculain, and reduces her pride by his knowledge of the prowess of the northern knights. He was Cuculain's first tutor; and the love which subsisted between the youth and himself forms a pathetic undernote in the whole epic.

In the great battle of Gaura, he meets Concobar whom he beats to the ground; but is prevented from slaying by Cuculain and Cormac Conlingas. There is a grand pathos in all this part of his career. Greater than all else, a sombre weight of mingled dignity and sorrow seems to cling around him; while he dominates all, he is himself a ruin. If, from Milton's Satan we take away pride and add the tenderest love and the profoundest melancholy, we can form some inadequate picture of this great hero. When Queen Meave organized that last hosting against Cuculain, she first disposed of Fergus, knowing that if he were with her

* The reader will remember that beneath these pages lies a great world of literature. Thus, there are several tales concerned exclusively with conquests effected in Connaught by this great exiled Ultonian.

she could not compass the death of his darling, Cuculain.

In the battle of Gaura there is a scene described, grotesque indeed, but not disagreeably so, such is the power of the heroic temper which informs every—even the lightest part. Here the chivalrousness and honour of Fergus strongly appear. Dúvac Dæl Ulla, one of the greater Ultonian exiles, proposes that the host of Meave should pretend flight so that Cuculain pursuing, might be enclosed and slain. Fergus, in sudden wrath, turns upon the proposer of this cowardly stratagem ; and as Dúvac turned to fly, the hero, in fact, kicked him ; but the kick was colossal, administered with the soles of his two feet, and that un-knightly champion was impelled forward—stumbling for a hundred yards when he fell amid the laughter of the beholders. The student cannot but feel how much superior is this comic incident to that corresponding one in the Iliad, where the runner slips and falls. Under the light music of comedy the heroic note still sounds.

Mingling with the voices of love and affection, with the purer glories, the high chivalrous temper, and with the heroic tone which sounds through all, we distinguish at times, though seldom, a harsher note, and see darker features, rudiments of the antique stock upon which the existing literature has been developed. Even Cuculain, the beautiful and chivalrous, under the stress of battle-fury, is transformed into a demonic shape of destructive wrath, a death-dealing, terrible spectre. Gory heads of slain champions adorn his chariot in ghastly rows. Fear and Panic go out before him ; from his eyes glare vivid lightnings ; the lips shrink

away from his mouth, and between his crashing teeth a voice like near thunder bellows. Like a bulrush in a flooded torrent he trembles and quakes in his anger. Black clouds gather round him pouring forth showers of deadly stars, the blood starts from his hair which lashes the wind as with gory whips, and all the demons that exult in carnage and in blood roar around him, while like the sound of a mighty drum his heart beats. More horrible still waxes the frightful picture, till the pen refuses to record it and the imagination to conceive. Anon, like a storm out of hell ridden by fiends, the war-fit is over and gone. Tender and faithful, radiant as the morning star, mildly glittering there in the dawn of the story of our race and land, reappears the son of Sualtam, shining out of his loneliness and suffering and his life of heroic labour and conflict, as though through some strange mist of tears.

In this great cycle, too, the grotesque is not absent, nor the indecent, while a sort of wild hilarity, a boyish light-heartedness and exhilaration are never long away. Nevertheless, the sublime and the tragic underlie and give their tone to all ; and amid the wildest freaks of fancy and rude gaiety the reader never forgets that he is in the august presence of demigods and heroes.

Bricrind Nimthenga, Bricrind of the poisoned tongue, was the Thersites of the cycle, but his satire and mischief were more subtle and refined than those of the Homeric character. He was one of the territorial lords of Ulster, and of great wealth, his estates embracing the Mourne mountains and the country along the sea-coast of Down ; his palace, Dún Rury. His character stands out clearly in the tale named the Feast of Bricrind. Bricrind erected a palace in his territory of enormous

size, and as vast and sumptuous as that of Concobar mac Nessa himself. On its completion he went to Emain Macha to invite the King, and the Knights, and the Heroines of the Red Branch to the first banquet in his new palace. The King, knowing his character, at first refused, but afterwards consented, on the condition that Bricind should journey back to Dún Rury by himself, and not associate with the Red Branch on the way. On their journey thither, however, he succeeded in addressing, one by one, the Knights of the Red Branch, particularly the three Champions, Cuculain, Conaill, and Lægairey, accosting each as the noblest, and insinuating that he was wronged by the others. Thus, when the Knights reached Dún Rury, their suppressed wrath could with difficulty be restrained from angry words and acts. When the feast was ready, Concobar declared that the host himself should not partake of it with them, "otherwise," said he, "our dead will be this night more numerous than our living." Bricind was then conducted out between a guard of warriors with bared swords. The modern custom of women retiring soon after dinner seems to have prevailed then. The High Queen and the wives of the Champions went out and sat upon the green sward conversing. Then Bricind approached Emer, the wife of Cuculain, praising the great prowess of her husband and her own beauty and accomplishments, and insinuating that there was a conspiracy against herself and her husband. Similarly he approached the wife of Conaill Carna and the wife of Lægairey Buada, suggesting to each that she should take the *pas* of the rest. Then Bricind ascended his grianan, a sort of upper chamber, which commanded a

view of the hall, seemingly attached upon the outside, though communicating with the interior.

As they returned to the palace the women broke into angry recriminations, heard by the warriors within, and, each hastening to precede the others, their progress became like the noise of a tempest.* Within, the suppressed fury of the angry Champions now broke forth, swords leaped from their scabbards, with fierce words, menaces, and uproar. Then Shenchá the Orator rang the Crave Ceol—Branch of Music—to still the tumult, and Concobar mac Nessa cried to the guards to shut to the door and exclude the women. Now, from without, arose the voices of the women, addressing each her own husband, declaring that she and he were wronged and insulted, and calling upon him by the memory of the past and all his great deeds to suffer it no more. Then arose Lægairey Buada, and brake the beams from the side of the palace when he heard the voice of his wife; and arose Conaill, and did the same, when he heard the voice of his. Thus, these two brought in their wives, giving them the *pas* of the rest, though they entered awkwardly through the ragged passages; but Cuculain summoned to him his Class of Power, *i.e.*, the Tuatha De Danān gods, who were his patrons, and, stooping down, seized with his hands the lower beams where they rested on the ground and raised up one side of the palace, so that the whole southern sky with its stars was visible, and, without stooping, Emer strode erect into the great central

* It will be remembered that to the bards all these characters were gigantic and terrible. C.f. Keat's description of Hyperion, and how his garments roared behind him like flame.

chamber of the Dún. Then the Hero let fall the palace with a crash, and, from his grianan, Bricind Nimthenga fell down and rolled along the sloping sward till he fell into the foss.

It was after this that commenced the series of tests and judgments, prolonged and repeated, but which, in every instance, terminated in favour of Cuculain, to whom was eventually adjudged the Champion's Throne of Ulla, and, to his wife Emer, to take precedence of every woman in the province, save only of the High Queen herself, Einey, the wife of Concobar.

On the same day as this feast, the historian relates that Cuculain seized and tamed his great war-steed, the Liath Macha, encircling Erin in a mighty strife with that "King amongst the war-horses of Erin."

Fergus mac Leda, King of the Isle of Rathlin. He is mentioned in the annals of Tihernah, as having been King of Ulster before Concobar, and as having been devoured by a sea-monster while swimming in the Moyle. In the Ultonian cycle he appears as one of the greater Knights of the race. The following is one description of this hero: "I beheld a sad hero with black tresses, his countenance lurid and wound-inflicting. Stout his thighs, each limb thicker than a man's body. Hatred mixed with murder sparkled in his eyes in his lofty head. Splendid his equipment, and conspicuous in beauty the raiment, armour, and equipment of his warriors. And thus was he equipped on account of his pleasant exploits as a cutter-off of multitudes; for he satiates himself in combats, and routs armies, and gains the upper-hand of his foes, so that they flee back to their own land, submitting themselves to his mercy. And it was not for reward, O son of Leda,

that thou hast come down to the smooth plains of Meath."

Before we blame the bards for this gigantic treatment of their history, we must remember, that in the statue which fronts Trinity College, we have represented Grattan in twice or three times his natural size, and that the Torso of Theseus has thighs actually thicker than a man's body. Art, in its treatment of heroes, seems instinctively to demand size. But the Irish bards believed in the gigantic stature of their heroes. Neither should the weird and supernatural surprise us and excite ridicule. The wonder would be if the bards, treating of their gods and heroes, did not sing of them as they have sung!

This Fergus mac Leda is described as a dear friend and comrade of Fergus mac Roy. How he did not share in the rebellion of his friend, we are not informed.*

* It was in this Ultonian cycle that the Irish Brehons discovered all their legal precedents and leading cases. In the vast literature and innumerable persons and incidents of the cycle, all that they needed was easily discoverable. The following is one out of many examples of this practice, indicating also what I have already suggested, viz., the immense epical underworld of which the greater heroes and heroines are but the ascending and super-eminent heights. The daughter of this Fergus is in it a leading case for the rights of women in the land of their kindred.

"Sithir claimed the land, i.e., Sithir, the daughter of Fergus mac Leda, who was married to Anluan, the son of Muadach, one of the Feini, and she had a son by him, Nia mac Anluan," &c.—*Brehon Laws*, Vol. iv., p. 9.

Take one other: "Cianachta, daughter of Fergus For-Cree and of Bri Ambui (Brigamba), who was wife to Blai Brugach, but whom Concobar mac Nessa bought after the death of her first husband. The woman wished to come to her kindred to demand land of them, namely, of Conaill Carna and Ainrigen."—*Brehon Laws*, Vol. iv., p. 17.

These are mere indications of what I will ask the reader to take from me as a fact, viz., the existence of a populous world well known to the ancient Irish underlying those half dozen names to which reference has been made.

Kelkar, son of Uther. His territory surrounded the district in which Dunpatrick stands to-day, and the great earthen rath near that town was associated with his name. His wife, Brigamba, was the first woman in Ireland who held landed property in her own right. She was also a judge and law-giver.

This is not the place to give a detailed account of the whole cycle, of its heroes and heroines, but enough has been done to suggest to the reader its character, and the tone of thought which prevails. The personages of this cycle may be counted literally by the hundred, there being many bye-plots and under-currents innumerable traversing the whole. Not one of these characters, not one of these many episodes and incidents are, properly speaking, imaginary ; they grew out of ancient traditions, ever believed in, and never consciously invented. Thus, they must always have a deep significance to men who investigate the bardic history of Ireland.*

The theory that the heroes of this cycle never existed at all, is to one understanding the bardic genius and its mode of operation, quite unphilosophical. They certainly did exist and flourish within a period of, perhaps, two centuries surrounding their alleged date. But the historical reality has been so tossed and tumbled in the evolution of the great epics that all else must be uncertain and conjectural.

Yet the literature is undoubtedly very ancient. Some of the tales are found in the *Leabar na Huidhré*, a MS. of the eleventh century. They are written in prose,

* Nearly all the contents of these chapters may be found in O'Curry's Works.

founded, as is distinctly proveable, on a pre-existing metrical original. That the cycle was formed before the introduction of Christianity is shown, both by the uncompromisingly ethnic character which pervades them, and by the fact that a bard* contemporary with St. Patrick, refers to some leading features of the cycle. The fact that the heroes are chariot-fighters, and the certainty that chariots were falling into disuse in the first century A.D., shows also how close to the age therein represented must have been the original poetry of which the existing tales are the descendants.

Still, though conjecture will use its rights when proof there is none, I cannot claim for this age a greater historical significance than I have done, save as a literary representation of the national temper and ideals in the age that preceded the introduction of Christianity, of which they are, certainly, a true and most valuable exponent.

The reader will have perceived the distinctively chivalric character of this literature, which, be its date and source what they may, is, at all events, or some of the most important portions of it, found in a MS.† written in the eleventh century, therefore, two hundred years before the rise of the chivalric literature of the Continent. It is a ruder, more archaic, but far deeper, prouder, and manlier expression of that Northern European spirit which, later on, gave birth to the literature of chivalry.

* See Part xii., chap. 4.

† For the date of the *Leabar-na h-Uidhré*, see preface to the photo-zynco-graphic copy of same, published by R.L.A. The correctness of the date is admitted by French and German scholarship.

As an example of the strange unapprehended degree and volume of emotion with which the ancient bards regarded the heroes of this age, I introduce the following excerpts,* descriptive of the great hero Cuculain:—

Over Breg Ross, over Brainé,
 They come over the highway,
 By the foot of Bailé-in-Bile;
 It is gifted with victories.
 He is a heroic hound who urges it [*i.e.*, the chariot];
 He is a trusty charioteer† who guides it;
 He is a noble hawk who speeds
 His horses towards the south.
 He is a martial hero;
 He is the presage of bloody slaughter;
 Surely it is not with indexterity
 He will give us the battle.
 Woe to the man that is upon the Tullach,
 Awaiting the Hound of Valour!
 I foretold last year
 That there would come a heroic Hound—
 The Hound of Emain Macha—
 A Hound with complexion of all colours;
 The Hound of a Territory—the Hound of Battle;
 I hear! I have heard!
 If I see the Champion of Cooalney
 With his ostentatiousness of fame;
 It is not in retreat he goeth from us—
 But towards us he cometh.
 He runneth, and it is not very slowly;
 Though fleet as the wind, not with difficulty [*i.e.* exertion],
 But like water from a high cliff,
 Or like the rapid thunder.

* See Preface to Edition of *Leabar-na-h-Uidhé*, published by R.I.A., p. 33 They evidently belong to a yet earlier stage of the literature than that upon which my sketch is founded.

† *Læg*. At the death scene, Cuculain bidding farewell to his charioteer, says that since he took him to be his charioteer no angry word had passed between them.

These metaphors of speed are, I think, quite unprecedented in literature ; and the last, when we consider the weird greatness of Cuculain, is most sublime—almost terrible. In certain portions of the cycle, we feel as if the Hero might, indeed, drive his war-car across the floor of heaven and expel the ancient gods as well as thunder across the plains of Eiré.

I know nowhere any genus of poetic expression under which this may be subordinated. The deep heroic note ; the rapt intensity ; the headlong rush of thought ; the passion of awe and admiration, which not being only that of the writer, but the accumulated inheritance of ages and generations, is steady and sustained—not violent and ecstatic—are not the whole of what we find here. There is something else here too—something weird and terrible and far removed from our apprehension—a range of sympathies, beliefs, emotions, which even if explained, we are aware that we could yet not imaginatively comprehend. They resemble some dark strong torrent—a moment here revealed—pouring as through some weird haunted chasm down which we peer, and traversing a world far different from our own—one with which, not the Homeric literature, nor the literature of chivalry, nor the mass of the existing bardic literature of Ireland—archaic though it be, and approximating nearest to this, might be regarded in correlation, or for any useful purposes compared.

CHAPTER IV.

TWO KINGS OF ERIN WITHIN THE ULTONIAN CYCLE.

A.D. 6. Cairbry Nia-far.

The floruit of Cuculain and the Red Branch, which occupied a period of some six years, is, by some authorities, filled with the Ard-Rieship of Cairbry Nia-far, King of Tara. It was his son Erc who, along with Lewy mac Conroi, slew Cuculain. In the battle of Gaura fought between the Red Branch and Queen Meave, this Erc appears amongst the northern warriors. He is described as a boy having red hair and a freckled face, his bratta crimson, and wearing on his breast a brooch of gold. Cuculain was his foster-father, and betrothed to him his daughter Fionscota, *i.e.*, beautiful flower.

Cairbry Nia-far was, in an evil hour, tempted to withstand the Red Branch; but was defeated in a great battle at Ros-na-ree on the Boyne, where Cuculain slew him. It was in revenge for his death that Erc joined the last hosting against his foster-father. In the fifth century, the death of Cuculain at the hands of Erc was the subject of bardic praise in the province of Leinster. The chief bard of the province wrote* of Erc:—

*"Stoutly the fair-haired prince
Smote his head from Cuculain."*

* *Dávac* contemporary of St. Patrick.

The sister of this Erc, Acaill, celebrated for her purity and affectionateness, deserves mention. When Erc, aided by Lewy mac Conroi, slew Cuculain, Conaill Carna, his friend, led the Red Branch southwards into Mid-Erin to avenge his death. The prowess of Conaill Carna and his bloody deeds in this campaign are related in a tale called "The Red Route of Conaill Carna." He slew Erc at Tara and Lewy mac Conroi on the Nore. Erc's sister Acaill, who is also described as "one of the six noble women of ancient Ireland," came down from Ulster to Tara shortly after the battle. As she neared Tara, a band of ruffian warriors met her, bearing the gory head of her brother, at which sight "her heart brake nutwise in her breast," and she fell from the chariot. Her tomb is now called the Hill of Skreen, to the east of Tara. That of Erc is hard by. Till Christian times, the Hill of Skreen was called the Mound of Acaill.*

A.D. 8. Lewy of the Red Circuits.

Eocha, the Melancholy, father of Queen Meave, had three sons who rebelled† against him, Bras, Nar, and Lothar. This Lewy was the son of one of those brothers, but adopted jointly by all three. After the defeat at Drum Criah, Lewy lived amongst the Red Branch; his foster-father being Cuculain.

In one of the strangest of the many tales told of Cuculain, the gods of Inver are represented as being

* Acaill is celebrated for her purity. A god, Eocha Garf, father of Bove Derg, genius of the Galtees, paid court to her in vain. On the death of Acaill, the Uítonians celebrated in her honour, "bright, pure games." See MS. Materials, Appendix.

† P. 189.

assailed by an overpowering Fomorian host. Being unable to defend themselves, they send Faun, the wife of Mananān, the sea-god, to bring Cuculain with her into fairy-land in order that he may defeat their terrible foes. Faun appears before the hero; and, at sight of her weird beauty, he forgets wife, home and country, and follows her into the mystic world of the Tuatha De Danān. There he conquers the Fomorians; but when he woos the goddess, Mananān suddenly appears and casts him out of fairy-land. He falls in the wilderness of Mid-Luhara. "It was then," sang the bard, "that Cuculain gave the three high leaps and the three south leaps of Murthemney," and abode naked and distracted in the wilderness. Finally, the Ultonians surrounded and seized him and brought him back to Emain Macha, where, for twelve months, he lay sick with a wandering mind. By his side sat Conaill Carna, Fergus mac Roy, Einey the Sorrowful, an Ulster queen, and a dear friend of the hero, and this Lewy at whose reign we have now arrived.

After the death of Cairbry Nia-far, the preceding king, the estates of the realm met at Tara to elect an Ard-Rie for all Ireland. The soothsayer who was consulted on this occasion, was supplied with a draught by the druids and laid asleep. Presently he awoke, and cried that he beheld the King of Erin in the form of a youth having red circles round his body, weeping beside the bed of a Champion dying of decline at Emain Macha. Messengers are despatched to Emain Macha, who announce to Lewy the resolution of the estates at Tara. For awhile Cuculain recovers from his melancholia, and, sitting up, advises his foster-son

as to his royal duties, after which his mind wanders again.

Lewy died for grief* on account of the death of his wife.

* Rievenerg means either red eyes, or red circles, or red circuits. All three explanations seem to be followed in the various histories.

PART IX.

Tara and Her Kings.

CHAPTER I.

ATTICOTTIC REVOLUTION.

As the fame of Ulster and the Red Branch pales and grows dim in the bardic literature, we perceive the current of history setting steadily towards Meath and the kings of the Midland. The purple light fades from Emain Macha and grows around Tara, reflecting in its own strange way the veritable facts of Irish history ; for it is certain that in the age which we now approach, Tara, by what steps is uncertain, did arrive at a certain metropolitan dignity—eclipsing all provincial centres of authority ; and that now the province of Meath began to exercise over Ireland a predominance which developed into a hegemony, and her kings to be kings paramount in Ireland.

Towards the end of the fourth century, as may be demonstratively shown, the Irish had achieved a certain national solidarity. The chief cause of this union of the Irish kings and their subjection to a common head, was the proximity of Rome, and the

chief fact connected with it was the great and paramount influence exercised by Tara. Now it is not in the nature of things that such an union could have suddenly started into existence. It was certainly the growth of centuries ; and I believe, that at the time to which we have now arrived, Tara began to exercise an influence upon the wars, politics, imagination and religion of the island, that the kings of Tara now began to assume a conceded authority outside their hereditary dominions, and that the main current of bardic history, henceforward, so far as it deals with Tara and her kings, is sufficiently reliable.

Of the succeeding five kings I can say nothing, except that they are there. The first, indeed, seems to be the chief of a race of Leinster heroes, corresponding to the hounds or demi-gods of Ulster, and forming a certain unhistoric cycle of their own.

After these, we pass an unsounded gulf called the Atticottic Revolution—on the further side of which appears the first historic King of Tara.

A.D. 9. Conco-bar the Red Browed. His father was Cu-Corb the Chariot-Hound, or Chariot-fighting Hero. Cu-corb's wife was the Amazon of Tara, Meave the Half-Red. To her is ascribed a bardic poem still extant, on the death of Cu-Corb, in which she relates how he swept like a razor over every territory ; how whiter than snow was his skin, blacker than the raven his eyebrows, &c.

A.D. 15. Crimthann Nar's Hero. Nar seems to have been a marine goddess, who was his patron deity. He built a fortress to protect Howth* Harbour. Crimthann

* Howth is generally called Dán Crimthann in the Irish literature. The Hill of Howth is Ben Edar.

is represented as bringing into Erin many treasures from abroad, amongst others, a wonderful chess-board.

A.D. 18. Feradach of the Fair-Judgments.

A.D. 20. Fiecha Finn.

A.D. 24. Fiecha Finōla.

In this reign occurred the celebrated Atticottic revolution, *i.e.*, the massacre of the aristocracy of Ireland by the plebeians.

Of that event, the following is the received version handed down from mediæval and bardic sources, and accepted hitherto by modern inquirers :

When the Milesians conquered Ireland, they established themselves as a dominant warlike aristocracy in the midst of a subject people, composed of the aboriginal inhabitants, Fir-bolgs, Nemedians, &c. These subject races, having submitted for many generations to the tyranny of the Milesian nobles, now conspired, and on the plain of Cru, in Connaught, at a solemn assembly, suddenly drawing concealed weapons, assassinated all the aristocracy of Erin ; after which, they raised to the Ard-Rieship their chief, Cairbry Cait-Ken,* and established all over the island a new order of society, with an Atticottic aristocracy replacing the Milesian.

The chief brehon and judge of this Cairbry was his own son Morann,† famous bardic type of uprightness

* This seems to mean Head of the Tribes, *i.e.*, the root or source of royal and princely Houses. Let it be remembered that clans, tribes, nations, &c., mean, in the bardic literature, families only, and not what we generally mean by those words.

† All through the Brehon Laws the decisions and dicta of Morann are perpetually referred to. Throughout the whole literature we perceive this plainly, that just laws and upright judges, next to heroism, attract bardic attention. Of course they could not excite the same enthusiasm.

and integrity. He wore a golden collar, which, when he was about to utter an unjust or illegal judgment closed around his neck, threatening strangulation. The same collar, put upon a witness, strangled him if he gave false evidence. Of Morann's famous collar, I know this only but from the genius of the literature. I believe that there once was, and, perhaps, may yet be discovered, a minute history of this collar, and of the source of this mysterious spirit of justice which dwelt within it.

On the death of Cairbry the virtuous judge Morann was, with one consent, elected King by the new Atticottic aristocracy ; but Morann's sense of justice overcame his ambition ; he resigned the Ard-Rieship, and, by his advice the Ard-Rieship was conferred upon Tuhall Tectmar, son of the last Milesian monarch, who with his mother had fled into the land of the Picts.

Another revolution, however, succeeded. The Atticotti conspired once more, expelled Tuhall Tectmar, and conferred the sovereignty upon another Atticottic Prince, Elim. Tuhall Tectmar, however, succeeded in defeating Elim, and, finally, the Milesian aristocracy recovered wholly their ancient power, reducing the plebeians once more to a position of inferiority.

After this, they divided all the subject races into many small tribes, so disposed in territories that they could not readily combine, but were severally overawed by strong Milesian tribes situated between. In the Book of Leinster, there is a most minute and accurate account of the various territories throughout Ireland so set apart for the Atticotti.

Such is the very reasonable account of this convulsion preserved in Irish histories. The whole affair,

however, belongs to the regions of mythology—not history.

The real name of this people is Aithech Tuatha, generally translated *plebeianæ gentes*, and metamorphosed into Atticotti by men who identified the people with the Atticotti of classical writers, about this time beginning to appear in the history of North-Western Europe, as a British* warrior nation in the pay of Rome—this rationalistic school imagining that after the counter-revolution numbers of the subject race passed over to the continent as mercenaries.

The name, however, may with equal plausibility be translated *giganteæ gentes*.

I have followed in the foregoing account the opinions of the best inquirers into the subject of ancient Irish history, who have unanimously treated this incident as historical. That, however, which to others stamps the account with genuineness makes it the less trustworthy to me, viz., its extreme reasonableness. In obscure ages the very verisimilitude of a narration always appears to me to be an argument tending the other way. It will be remarked in the history of all nations that the accounts preserved of very ancient, but, certainly, historical characters, are singularly meagre, but if we pass beyond such a period, we find the accounts lucid, well ordered, and minute. The revolution of the Aithech Tuatha is so minutely described, and seems so historical, that I at once felt a suspicion of its genuineness, knowing the obscure character of the centuries in which it is placed. In fact, it is too historical to be history.

* I have elsewhere suggested that they are Irish.

The Milesian aristocracy, to have been the occasion of such a movement, must have formed a well-defined, strongly-associated caste all over the island. In an island filled with warring tribes and nations, and without national solidarity, such an alliance of the servile peoples is inconceivable. An Atticot of Munster plundered by Leinster-men, would feel all the hostility of his own masters to the adjoining nation. In a land of warring tribes, the necessary solidarity of the servile classes would not arise. If the reader will use his imagination upon the subject, he will perceive that such an union of inferior races would, in such a country, be out of the question. In fact, such a revolution could only co-exist with a settled social system and a general reign of law.

I believe Cairbry Cait-Ken to have been a god, and the Aithech Tuatha, a division or phasis of the Tuatha De Danān race appearing at the commencement of the great Temairian cycle which is here commencing. Keatinge, in his list of the Tuatha De Danān gods, mentions by name Cairbry Cait-Ken. Now, it is extremely improbable that there could have been both a god and a very conspicuous mundane king having the same name and the same peculiar surname.*

But he is also certainly mentioned in the preceding Ultonian cycle. Queen Meave, in her wars with Cuculain, urges Fardia, son of Daman, to go out and contend with the northern champion, promising him

* Or it may have been a floating cycle—wandering homeless—and at length thrust violently in here, hammered and welded into the partition or suture between the heroic and the Temairian cycles, by those who were resolved to find for it somewhere a local habitation and a place in the bardic history.

land and gifts. Fardia demands security, and the Queen, proposing a sacred engagement, with pledges, adds : "Bind it upon Cairbry," "bind it upon Morann." Now, these two personages, who undoubtedly appear here in a certain sacred character, are undoubtedly the same as the Cairbry and Morann of this Atticottic business.

The explanation of the whole affair is probably this : Irish history is composed of various cycles of bardic tradition, which in scholastic ages were welded together into the form of a consecutive history. Everything shows that at this point a great cycle of bardic tradition is commencing, namely, that which deals with the various Kings of Tara. At the head of this cycle would naturally stand purely mythological or divine persons. In fact, the ethnic Kings of Tara traced descent back to the god Cairbry, and his virtuous son, Morann.

When the Christianized bards and monks came to construct the national narrative, and to reconstruct the pedigrees, they were obliged, in order to avoid the necessity of deriving the Kings from demons, as they held that the Tuatha De Danān were, to make away with Cairbry and Morann in some mode or other. They therefore regarded them as usurpers, and carried the genealogical line past, but not through them.

Having come to regard them with hostility, the further step of regarding them as plebeians was determined, I think, by that wave of democratic feeling which certainly swept over the island in the time of St. Columba. The amazing intellectual energy generated by the bards could hardly have existed without affecting the lower classes of society, suggesting a dim

notion that they, too, had rights. In the sixth century the unattached bards of the island seem to have become the spokesmen of this feeling, so much so that certain stern measures were taken against them by the aristocracy. Thenceforward, the patrician bards and monkish secular writers would be aware of the existence of servile discontent, and when the divine character of these Atticottic personages was forgotten, the notion that they were a servile race, usurping the place and privileges of the Milesian aristocracy, would naturally arise.

The fine critical intellect of Tihernah is here again apparent, for he makes no allusion to this "servile revolt."

I have several times noticed in Keatinge's history allusions to the marriages of princes with fair plebeians, and remarked that the names of the latter suggest a divine character. I feel certain that at one time the historiographers of Ireland entertained the notion that all the pre-Milesian peoples either were or became plebeians. This idea would be strengthened by the fact that a belief in them lingered longest in the minds of the poor and the least educated.

The Atticotti of Roman writers I yet am inclined to think were the Irish. Though called a British* tribe, they are not mentioned in the enumeration of those tribes who inhabited Romanized Britain, while their appearance in the Roman army shows that they must have been beyond the reach of Rome's enervating

* Britannia was sometimes used to signify both islands.

power. That they were not the Picts, is shown by the fact that one writer alludes to the Picts and the Atticotti as attacking Romanized Britain. Their appearance in such a context, therefore, suggests the idea that Scoti or Irish and Atticotti are convertible terms.* If they are not the Scoti, one hardly knows what to make of them.

Out of the Atticottic confusion and the wars connected with it, and to which I can only refer, there arises a King of Tara, Tuhall Tectmar, with whom commences a genealogical line of descending kings, which I regard as historical.

Hitherto we have traversed an enchanted land, where all things rock and reel, where the most real-seeming footholds break like a film, where the trodden road melts away like a mirage; a land now lit with magic glares and filled with thronging forms, now silent as the grave and plunged in unmitigated gloom, as the imaginative faculty, so bard-stimulated, and the critical, assert alternate† sway, a land in which the historian like that ancient, not reputable traveller wanders perplexed—

*"In a boggy Syrtis neither sea
Nor good dry land, nigh foundered on he fares,
Treading the crude consistence half on foot
Half flying; behoves him now both oar and sail.
* * * * *
O'er bog or steep, through strait, rough, dense, or rare,
With head, hands, wings, or feet pursues his way,
And swims, or sinks, or wades, or creeps, or flies."*

* I suggest to antiquarians and philologists the inquiry whether Scoti may not be a derivative from Atticotti, produced thus: Atticotti, Assicotti, Sicotti, Scoti.

† Neither pure imagination nor history, but both, for Chaos, too, is made of shattered worlds, and is the matrix of new ones.

Before all histories stands such a chaos, great or small, according to the genius of the race, but I doubt whether there exists anywhere a parallel for the vast and shoreless worlds of mythological and semi-historical literature which this country presents to the wondering gaze of its historians.

Here now, however, at this point, A.D. 79, or its neighbourhood, we see the first gleam of historic light, faint and struggling amid the darkness, shot in from the world of men and facts, and the wholesome honest sun of reliable verifiable evidence. Here, first, we touch a solid foot-hold which does not yield, the first firm stepping-stone in the morass, soon to be followed by the thin historic track or path.

This king is historic and the ancestor of a line of descending historic kings, which, being so,* I think that I may accept the main tenor and large facts that appear concerning them in the literature which now steadily encircles each, advancing regularly in a cyclic progress, indicating, as they do, certain phenomena, which, on other grounds, we know that these ages did produce. Thin, indeed, and slight is this historic clue, consisting only of a genealogical line of Kings of Tara, with the gradual growth of the institution of the Ard-Rieship, and of the predominance of Tara in the wars and politics of the age. But, when kings are historic, the literature which surrounds them individually and in succession, must have started from the impression which the personality of each of these kings created upon the imagination of his age. Such an impression could not well be obliterated, and when we find the

* See Part xiii.

main tenor of that literature according with that which is antecedently probable, it may, I think, be provisionally accepted, being in itself probable, and being attested by a literature whose first form was historic, encircling, as it does in each case, a historic king. This imaginative history runs steadily forward, surrounding every King of Tara, or of all Ireland, down to the Norman invasion, illuminating, too, though in a smaller way, the Norman princes. As far back as contemporary independent evidence reaches, the main features of this literature can be proved to be correct. Therefore, I believe, that as far back as the historic kings extend, the testimony of the literature encircling each cannot be quite waived aside. At all events, I deem it more philosophical to regard it, than to disregard. I think this is true of the history of all nations. Where personages are historic, anecdotes related and accepted concerning them enclose a kernel of fact.

The two chief facts connected with the reign of Tuhall Tectmar, are the importance of Tara,* and the institution of the Boromean tribute of Leinster.

The latter event thus rounds itself in the bardic mind into this pretty mythus. Tuhall had two beautiful daughters, Feer and Dareena. Eocha Ain-ken, a Leinster King, espoused Dareena, but, at the wedding, saw and preferred her sister. After a time he conceived a

* According to the histories he expanded the mensal lands of Tara, by adding in portions taken from all the other provinces, thus forming the province of Meath. This statement, which may or may not be history, but which certainly is not proveable history, Mr. Skene, much praised for caution, uses as an argument to establish certain facts, not with regard to Ireland, but with regard to Scotland. Those who hesitate to follow the path by which I arrive at the few historical facts which I aver with regard to these centuries will remember that I ask them to do less than Mr. Skene.

wicked plot in order to gratify his desires. He strictly immured Dareena, giving out that she was dead, and thus succeeded in marrying his wife's sister. The two sisters subsequently met by accident. Feer died of shame, and Dareena of grief at the death of Feer.

Tuhul Tectmar then invaded Leinster, but Eocha and the natives of Leinster made amends by undertaking to pay a great eric annually to the King of Tara. Henceforward, every successive King of Tara forced or endeavoured to force the payment of this tribute* in Leinster. In later ages the apportionment of this exaction was made between various military nations of northern and central Ireland.

The power of Tuhul Tectmar, I do not think, was extensive—embracing only the territory around Tara, the middle of Ireland, and certain portions† of Connaught. The origin of the tribute was a movement southwards of the military confederacy formed in the midlands, and holding possession of Tara.

Around this place and its kings revolves all the literature and history of the ensuing ages. Here commences the great cycle of bardic literature which I have denominated the Temairian, as distinguished from that preceding Ultonian cycle of which Cuculain and the Red Branch knights are the chief *personæ*. This Temairian cycle runs down to the commencement of the fourth century, including as one of its subdivisions, the great Ossianic cycle relating to Finn mac Cool and the Fenian heroes who fill the third century. In the Ultonian cycle, Tara, with its accompanying

* It is said that Brian Ború, or Borome, was so called because he revived against Leinster this ancient tribute.

† Also, I think, the north-west of Ireland, which was certainly not subject to the Red Branch.

idea of the supreme king of all Ireland, hardly appears at all, or plays a minor and unimportant part.

As to the origin of Tara. In the ages of which I am now treating, on the death of a conspicuous king or hero, his people raised for him a mound or cairn, and celebrated his funeral rites with games and lamentations. The mounds of other great chieftains of the same clan or nation were reared hard by. Thus, the spot became celebrated; and the periodical meetings in honour of the original heroes there interred, began to be turned to account for political and social purposes. Hundreds of such spots existed all over Ireland; but as the national solidarity increased, there emerged in the centre of Ireland, certain places of this nature which became meeting places for all Ireland. These were four in number---*Thetga*,* *Winn*,† *Tailteen*,‡ and Tara. It is said that this king, *Tuhul Tectmar*, made such arrangements that the periodical gatherings at these places should not clash. Out of them, by the principle of natural selection, Tara eventually rose supreme; influencing not only current history, but casting back into the past---influences which profoundly affected the mythology and the semi-mythical history of the island.

Thus, for Ireland Tara became the centre of the plastic and formative principle, and a germ of solidarity and national union; the centre upon which the chaos of the septal struggles was destined to subside; the source of a sovereignty, not absolute indeed, but still considerable, and the harbinger of better things to come; a place of rude parliaments and conventions, of

* Hill of Ward, near Athboy, Co. Meath.

† Umagh Hill, Parish of Killare, Westmeath.

‡ Telltown, Co. Meath.

the justest law and the wisest brehons ; the most frequented fair green ; best mart to the jeweller for his rings and brooches ; to the armourer for his weapons ; to the foreign merchant for his silks and wines ; where the harper found his art best judged and best rewarded ; where the chronicler could best display and best correct his dry antiquities, and the bard or rhapsodist find the most liberal and appreciative audience.

The most ancient mode of interment seems to have been the erection of the cromlech or "druid's altar," above the urn containing the charred relics of the dead, or over them, inhumed. Above the cromlech so raised, they piled a great mound of earth or stone, *Galica, cairn** or *carn*. These cairns, enclosing first the cromlech and then the cinerary urn, are found alike in Ireland, Greece, and Hindostan, the great Aryan race as it burst upon the world, bringing with them everywhere this monumental symbol of their presence and their civilization. From this primitive type sprang the classic temples of Greece and the great raths and cathairs of this country, with, finally, the primitive churches and the round towers of christianized Ireland. From this source sprang two streams—one visible, the other invisible. From the *carn* sprang religious architecture ; and from the hero to whom the *carn* was sacred, sprang the god.

How accurately typified in our bardic literature is the cyclic psychological progress of the Irish mind, and how faithfully reflected therein are the changes of that secular revolution, is evident to all who look

* Carn or cairn does not necessarily mean a heap of stones. It is simply a tumulus or barrow.

below the surge and glitter of this ocean of bardic song which over-rolls the pre-historic and semi-historic ages of Ireland. An examination of the barrows of Moy Tura, Cong, reveals the fact that the tombs of those far-off Fir-bolgia deities conquered by the classic gods of Ireland, contain the primitive cromlech and cinerary urn.*

Nay, more, certain facts with regard to the interior of these cairns justify statements in the Irish bardic history of the battle, proving the genuineness and antiquity of the traditions which ultimately took form in the epic tale of the battle of Moy Tura. To what depths of time these traditions run back, is shown by the fact that the tombs of Moy Tura were erected by men in the stone age, no metallic instrument or ornament having been there found.†

Around these primitive cairns there ran a circumvallation of earth, doubtless enclosing the sacred precincts of the tomb, the *réparois* of this germ of the temple.

From the cairn and its enclosure, two modes of religious architecture seem to have been generated. In the first the cairn and cromlech disappear or become rudimentary, the dignity of the structure depending upon the mural circle which absorbs the attention of the architect, and which is now, in this stage, constructed of stone and made high and exceedingly massive, the walls of some being more than twenty feet thick. The dignity of the architecture is also increased

* See Ferguson's work on "The Stone Monuments of all Ages."

† See Ferguson. At the excavation of one of these mounds, Sir W. Wilde informed the excavators beforehand exactly what they would find in the centre; his authority being the bardic tale of the battle of Moy Tura.

by the erection of one or two concentric circumvallations of earth surrounding the inner mural circle.

Probably the finest example of these sacred enclosures or temples is the great cyclopean building called Cahir Conroi.* In the same county, are also Cahir Gall, near Cahirciveen, and the Staigue Fort. Photographs of the great cathairs of Arran will be seen in Miss Stokes' work on "Irish Architecture." In the Royal Irish Academy there is a painting of the Ailech Neid of Innishowen, i.e., the stone-house or temple of Ned, the war-god—a fine example of the temple in this stage. All over Ireland may still be found such raths and cathairs—some of them even now very magnificent and imposing.

In the second mode of development, the simple majesty of the cromlech yields place to a bee-hive shaped chamber composed of enormous stones, a cyclopean architecture. When men abandoned the cromlech they endeavoured to retain its spirit by the massiveness of the stones with which the central vault or adytum was constructed. This saxi-formed chamber communicates with the open air by means of a flagged passage. The so-called Treasury of Atreus seems to be the carn in this stage.

Simultaneously with the transformation of the cromlech, the mound itself is flattened upon the top, presenting the appearance of a beautifully levelled lawn surrounded with a mural circle. The rites and ceremonies previously performed round the carn are, or some of them, performed *upon* it; and the circum-

* See p. 220.

† It seems strange that after the enormous labour of erecting those massive cromlechs, they should forthwith cover them up for ever.

vallation which previously encompassed the mound at some distance, is now a portion of the mound itself—rendering the lower part of the cairn more artistic and distinct.

Such is the great mound of New Grange on the Boyne, the house or temple of the Dagda Mór;* and in later literature, the enchanted dwelling-place of his beautiful son Angus.

From this rock-built chamber grew the primitive Irish church—roofed as it is by the overlapping of flat stones and upheld without any artificial support; also the round tower which is but a mode of the same architectural spirit. The smallness of Irish Christian architecture arose from the fact that it started† from this subterranean germ and not from the majestic hypæthral buildings of the age. The latter were more plainly and openly connected with the pagan cults of the day, the visible centres of religious conventions. Is it not probable that the hypæthral character of the Greek temple is but a continuation of the open rath and cathair of ancient times? The ancients had certainly some religious objection to the performance of sacred rites and the holding of solemn assemblies under roofs.

In pagan architecture the saxi-formed chamber did not grow, and seems to have reached its highest development in the temple of the Dagda Mór, which, in its way, is certainly very imposing; huge pebbles rising one over the other above the head of the

* See p. 104.

† Even in the ethnic ages the *clochauns*, or bee-hive shaped houses made of small stones, were erected, e.g., those within the great stone cathairs of Arran. See Miss Stokes' work on "Irish Architecture."

beholder. But the spirit of the age was one of emotions—massive and simple, and of imaginings nobler and larger than we can in an age like this quite bring ourselves into sympathy with. The more ancient heroic literature reflects, in words, the same spirit which on another side produced those great raths which, to the least emotional beholder, suggest greatness and sublimity of thought.

The architectural remnants of Tara exhibit the existence of raths only, and not of cars; though there is extant yet one very primitive car, the "Coronation Hill," upon which stood the Lia Fail. Tara is, therefore, no more than one of a hundred similar groups of raths and mounds appearing in every territory in Ireland; but which, through the operation of certain political and military causes, arrived at a metropolitan dignity and became for all Ireland what other places of a similar nature were for territories or provinces. In primitive times religion and politics intermingle; and thus all such places had a twofold importance. There men worshipped their deified ancestors, and there military and political conventions were held. Such places, of course, should be strongly held—their possession being doubtless a symbol and proof of mastery in the land. The King of Tara, we may be sure, was really, and in fact for several centuries, the Ard-Rie* of Ireland. Around Tara, we may be sure his military strength was massed, or in

* The title does not necessarily imply direct rule, but that its holder was the most celebrated and powerful king of the age. But he who simultaneously held the title and held Tara, must have exercised a very wide influence.

places whence it could be readily summoned* to repel assailants.

But Tara never was—or could have been—a city. Primarily and essentially it was a cemetery. Subsequently and in consequence of its having been a cemetery, it became the scene of religious interest, of periodic games, fairs, and of great conventions of the estates of the realm or territory. Near Wexford, was a place called Garmān—a plain of giant tombs still in existence. This was the great centre of assemblages for the nations of southern Leinster and the Ossorians or people of Ossory. A bard of some Christian century, in a magnificent bardic poem, gives a rich and glowing account of the “fair” held here in his own time. First, he sings the traditional history of the place—a history in complete sympathy with the whole national epos—beginning with the topical wars of the Tuatha De Danān with some Fir-bolgic giant race; then the advent of the Milesians when Heremon seizes the sacred spot, and his posterity for many generations are paramount there; then the history of the demi-gods of Leinster of the age of the Red Branch, i.e., Mesgāra and his contemporaries; and finally, how “the powerful, red-speared Cathair Mōr” seized Garmān and confined its presidency to his own spreading tribes.

Of the fair itself, he gives a most animated and vigorous description, enumerating all its chief features—the booths of the merchants and of the foreign Greeks; the convention of kings and princes for political affairs; the assemblages of the bards and

* In the Ossianic literature, we read frequently of a body of warriors performing this function, called the “Four Pillars of Tara.”

brehons to rectify annals and genealogies, and to announce the laws; the prohibition of arms; the sports of buffoons and jugglers and the music of the musicians; the recitation of Fenian tales of Finn—an untiring entertainment; the steed-contests* of the Ossorians, and the clash of arms from the whole host terminating the assembly after seven days. From not celebrating it, he alleged there came upon kings the curse of early greyness, melancholy, cowardice, and want of hospitality.†

Such, too, as Garmán, was Tara, save that the conventions here were for the whole of Ireland, but in mediæval literature the idea appeared, took root, and grew, that Tara was in ancient times a city, a mere fancy of the old antiquarians, accepted by modern writers without examination. It is easy to see how the notion grew. The tomb of the hero after his apotheosis, or even without it, began to be regarded as his house or temple in which he mysteriously dwelt. This is not conjecture on my part, for the literature everywhere reveals the thought. A group of tombs then became a group of such weird houses, and in mediæval ages would naturally suggest the existence there of the ruins of an ancient city.

The history of Tara, as revealed in its physical features, is quite in harmony with these views. There is thus one ancient mound upon which was set the coronation stone, the Lia Fail; then, there are the double and treble circumvallated raths of the age of

* In the heroic age these were chariot-races.

† The poem is worthy of close study, alike for its antiquarian and for its literary interest. See M. & C. vol. iii., p. 529.

the demi-gods ; finally, the vast wall-encircled* raths, intended for solemn assemblies, political or religious.

It is distinctly recorded of Lægairey mac Niall, King of Ireland, in the time of St. Patrick, that he was buried in one of these sacred raths, which, therefore, was not and could not have been used as a profane dwelling-place.

We can now understand the significance of that passage in St. Fiech's hymn and his reference to St. Patrick and Christianity, as in some way hostile to Tara :

*" The Tuatha† of Erin used to prophesy that a new reign of faith
would come,
That it would last for evermore,
That the land of Tara would lie waste and desolate."*

If Tara were associated only with fairs and assemblies, there would be no meaning in these lines, but if we suppose that it was connected with pagan religious rites and the worship of the Tuatha De Danān, we can see its force.

It is stated that in the sixth century the Kings of Ireland ceased to dwell in Tara, in consequence of the curse pronounced upon it by St. Ruadan. The real cause of the desolation which fell upon Tara must be looked for in that revolution of thought and feeling which is referred to in those lines of St. Fiech. Tara was one of the chief centres of the pagan

* On the southern slope of the hill may be seen traces of one magnificent rath, almost overgrown with earth, but the stone wall is apparent in places. This was Cathair Cro-Finn, i.e., the open walled temple of Cro-Finn, a Tuatha De Danān goddess.

† This is either peoples or the Tuatha De Danān.

religion, and, as such, fell* under the ban of the Christian monks.

I feel certain that the legend of Ilium, and its siege by the Greeks, was generated in precisely the same psychological conditions which, in mediæval Ireland, converted Tara into a city. In Ireland the mound groups became either the scene of a great battle, like Moy Tura, or the site of an ancient city, like Tara or Rath Cruhane. In the legend of Ilium these fancies are combined. I also think it probable that the Olympian gods sprang from the far-off pre-Homeric heroes of that mounded plain.

It is with the reign of this King, Tuhul Tectmar, that Tara seems to advance into a sort of metropolitan dignity as compared with the other great mound-groups of central Ireland.

So far, the main tenor of the literature seems to import that on the cessation of the predominance exercised by the north of Ireland, typified by the hegemony of the Red Branch, a western nation moved out into the midlands and seized Tara. This is indicated by the legend of the Aithech Tuatha, who, a Connaught race, stand at the head of the Temairian cycle, and is further substantiated by the close connection between the grandson of this Tuhul Tectmar and that portion of Ireland.—(See the reign of Conn).

This tribal confederacy begins now to operate south-eastward against the adjoining nations of Leinster, typified in the institution of the Boromean tribute. The reader will find the line of Tuhul Tectmar steadily

* The fair of Garman was also discontinued, but afterwards revived.

advancing in power and dignity until it culminates in the great monarch Niall, whose power extended far beyond the limits of Ireland, and in whose family the Ard-Rieship of Erin remained for a period of six centuries.

A.D. 109. Mal, son of Rury.

This was a Red Branch prince. The power, however, of this great and warlike nation is on the wane, though, from time to time, one of their kings is elected or fights his way to the Ard-Rieship.

A.D. 113. The line of Tuhall Tectmar is restored at this date in his son, Felimy Rectmar. His reign is signalized by an extension of Temairian authority, and the establishment of a new historic nation. Felimy Rectmar, and an Ultonian prince claiming descent from the great Red Branch champion, Conaill Carna, drove back the Heberian nations from the territory now called King's and Queen's County. This prince was Lewy Leix, son of Leix Land-Mör, son of Conaill Carna. These counties formed, till the reign of Queen Mary, a sort of separate realm, named Leix, or the country of the children of Leix Land-Mör, whose son, as feudatory to Felimy Rectmar, was its first King.

We shall shortly find Tara extending its authority further south.

Felimy Rectmar was slain in battle by the Leinstermen under Cathair Mör.

A.D. 120. Cathair Mör, "the powerful red-speared Cathair," a Leinster prince. It would seem as if that movement against the nations south of the Liffey, typified under the imposition of the Boromean tribute, had the effect of uniting and solidifying the tribes of

that province.* At all events, they now, and by force, drive the race of Tuhail out of Tara, and establish one of their own princes there.

From Cathair Mör all the ruling families of Leinster derived their descent. In Irish history, dealing as it does with the wars of a military aristocracy, every powerful and successful king leaves behind him such wide-ruling families. The great Niall, to whom reference is often made, left behind him sons from whose direct authority very little of the whole of the north and centre of Ireland escaped.

There is still extant an ancient tract† called the will of Cathair Mör, consisting of a prediction by this king, of the fortunes of his various sons, resembling somewhat the prophesyings of Jacob concerning his posterity. It was evidently the work of bards, who were wise after the event.

Of Rossa Faley, the eldest ancestor of the powerful mediæval nation of O'Connor Faley, he prophesied :—

“ My sovereignty, my splendour,
My wealth, and my strength,
To my fierce Ross, my vehement Faley.
He shall make gifts and shall not hoard his wealth,
He shall be victorious in border battles,
And contend for the plain of Tara.”‡

Of Dairey Barra :§

* During these centuries a general solidification of clans is observable all over Ireland.

† See the Book of Rights, pp. 216 *et seq.* The ensuing quotations are slightly abridged and condensed.

‡ Contend for,—not conquer. None of the Leinster princes, after Cathair Mör, was Ard-Rie of Ireland. The territories of the children of Rossa Faley embraced Kildare and portions of King's and Queen's Counties.

§ The children of Dairey Barra held most of Carlow.

" My valour, my impetuosity,
 To my fierce, vigorous Dairey.
 The darling of the concourse of heroes
 Shall every firm son of thy loins be.
 Thou shalt sit on the frontier of Tuath Láhan,*
 And harass the borders of Des Gavan."†

Of Brasal Einech-Glas : ✕

" My sea with its full produce,
 To sweetly-speaking Brasal.
 Take thou to thee the Inver‡ of Amargin."

Of Ceata, he prophesied subjection and servile
 tributes.§

For Fergus he predicted neither territory, nor power,
 nor valour, as a punishment for his random speeches.

Of Crimthann :

" Crimthann, my boyish hero,
 He is a lock|| on the black-birds of the meadow,
 None venerable of his race save one¶ only."

Of Eocha Timeena, that he would never expel brave
 men from territories, or be a parent of mighty tribes,
 but that he would be a steward to his brethren.

Of Oileel, great possessions and skill in chess-playing,
 but that not noble should be his rath, i.e., wealth,

* The north of Leinster.

† The modern county of Wexford.

‡ Amargin the Druid of the sons of Milosius.—See p. 171. Inver Amargin was Arklow.

§ From the children of Ceata, i.e., the Hy-Ceata, the barony of Ikenathy, in the north of Kildare, takes its name.

|| I cannot explain this allusion.

¶ Colam, son of Niamid, Abbot of Terryglass, Lower Ormond, fifth in descent from Cathair Mór. Many of the Irish saints were descended from Cathair, amongst others, Columba, on the mother's side.—See pedigree of Columba, Part xiii., chap. 1.

without princely rank. To him Cathair gave his chess*-board and chess-furniture.

Then came Fiecha the Lame, his youngest son, and Cathair Mór said : "I have naught left for thee," and the boy wept. Then said Cathair, "I shall bless thee," and he said :

"A chief shall the prosperous junior be,
Fiecha, a man of many hundreds,
The gifted hero from the foaming Barrow :
Him his brethren shall serve,
For he shall rule over Ailinn† and Garmán,‡
Over venerable Allen§ and Naas the impregnable,
And over the Height of Lara.||
He shall illustrate Arget Ros¶ and Liamain,**
The lands of Alva he shall mightily seize,
And prostrate†† the chiefs of Tara,
And the fair of Tailteent‡‡ magnify.

We have here enumerated all the conspicuous cemeteries, therefore, centres of authority in Leinster. The posterity of Fiecha the Lame, youngest of the sons of

* It is interesting to find a whole family, through generations, celebrated for proficiency in this game. It was the tendency of the Irish clan-system to produce such distinctive family traits. Thus, some families were noted for history, some for law, some for medicine, &c.

† Old Kilcullen, Co. Kildare.

‡ See p. 263.

§ The Hill of Allen, five miles north of Kildare,—strewn with mounds and raths. Here was Finn's mythic palace, and the centre of the power of that strange military league, the Fianna Eireen.—See Part xi. Naas was the chief seat of the worship of Lu Lam-fáda, the god.

|| See p. 73, note **

¶ See p. 176.

** Dun Lavan, west of county Wicklow.

†† Niall Mór and Oilel Molt were slain by great-grandsons of Fiecha the Lame.—See "Four Masters."

‡‡ To the presidency of this minor fair they might attain, not that of the great national conventions of Tara, the regulation of which was the privilege of the Ard-Ríe.—For the origin of Tailtean, see p. 118, now Telltown, Co. Meath.

Cathair Mōr, became the dominant tribe of this portion of Ireland.

Meanwhile, the sons of Felimy Rectmar were being educated amongst the nations west of the Shannon. Eventually, the eldest, Conn, surnamed of the Hundred Battles, crossed into the mid-lands, defeated the Leinster confederacy in a great battle at Moy Acha, in Meath, and slew Cathair Mōr. This Cathair was the last Leinster prince who held the Ard-Rieship of Ireland. In the time of Henry the Second, when there was some idea of putting forward Dermot M'Murrough, the Leinster King, as a candidate for the Kingship of all Ireland, the fact that this remote ancestor ruled as Ard-Rie over Ireland was recalled by the supporters of Dermot.

CHAPTER II.

CONN OF THE HUNDRED FIGHTS.

A.D. 125. Conn, surnamed of the Hundred Battles.

In his reign we find, for the first time, Munster drawn within the vortex of wars and politics perpetually surging round Tara, which seems to have been in these and subsequent ages, as it were, the throne of Ireland. The King who held Tara was Ard-Rie of Erin. Every powerful candidate aimed at its possession, and numberless battles were fought in its vicinity by those who sought to gain or to retain those sacred and king-making raths. Here, too, was the celebrated Lia Fail, or Stone of Destiny, standing on which, the Ard-Rie swore

the customary oaths. With his foot on this stone, and holding the wand presented to him by the proper officer, he faced the four points of heaven, according to the ancient law. That the stone roared for joy beneath the feet of a rightful monarch was one of the cherished fancies of mediæval bards. Two traditions obtained with regard to it; one, that it was brought into Erin out of Germany, by the Tuatha De Danān; the other, that the ancestors of Milesius had brought it from the East to Spain, and that his sons had conveyed it thence into Erin. It was first placed on the most ancient of the mounds of Tara, but has been recently changed to a rath further to the north, where it is still shown to visitors and antiquarians.

It was once held that the Lia Fail had been brought to Scotland for the coronation of Fergus Mór mac Erca,* and that it was retained at the Abbey of Scone, until removed to London by Edward the First. Petrie, however, believes this to be a mediæval fancy, and that the Lia Fail is that which is still on the Hill of Tara, and is planted on the knoll called by the peasantry "croppies' grave."

The chief historical fact apparent in connection with this King is the advance southwards of Temairian influence, typified in the epic wars of Conn with the nations of Munster, of which I give a sketch in the ensuing chapter, and the absorption of southern dynastic centres, petty vortexes of social attraction, into the growing maelstrom of wars and politics, ever whirling around Tara, of which—for the bardic literature in these and all ages is a reflection of the fact, not the fact itself—

* In the fourth century.

we rather hear the roar and see the foam and glittering spray, than trace the course and witness the extent of its swift and intervolved gyrations. Nevertheless, in these southern wars of Conn, we do perceive one step forward in the direction of that comparative national solidarity achieved by the Irish in the fourth and fifth centuries. Tara, which in the last reign has put a hand upon Leix, in the present reaches still further towards the southern sea.

Amongst minor facts is the reference to the reign of this warrior of "a hundred battles," of the construction of four great roads leading out of Tara, Slie Dála, westward to Clonmacnoise, Slie Midluachra, through Louth into Ulster, Slie Asail, through King's County into Ormond, and Bohar Cullen through Dublin and the valley of Glanna Smól into Leinster.

In the reign of Conn, the Temairian confederacy embraced the northern portions of Connaught, continuing that connection to which I called attention in the reign of Tuhall Tectmar. It was here Conn was brought up; his foster-father being Conall, King of Rath Cruhan, the centre of Queen Meave's semi-mythical sovereignty during the heroic ages. In Conn's southern wars it is from the nations west of the Shannon that he derives his chief support. While these western warriors support the kings of Tara in Leinster and Munster, the confederacy is evidently working forward also in the north-west of Ireland. Its course ran through Ballyshannon, covering the modern counties of Donegal and Tyrone. That this was the path of the advance of the Ard-Rieship will be seen further on, when we perceive the direction from which came the blow which prostrated the great Red

Branch nations; and, further, from the firm hold gotten in the north of Connaught and the west of Ulster, by Eocha Moymodōn, R. H., A.D. 358, and his sons.*

It will be remembered that the ancient name of the territories west of the Shannon, was Olnegm-acta, i.e., the land of the Children of the Mighty Negma (Oll-Negma), an ancient god or hero of ages anterior to Queen Meave. Henceforward, however, the province is named Connachta (Connaught), the land of the Children of Conn of the Hundred Battles. I believe, too, that the following Titanic myth reflects, in its own wild way, what was certainly a fact, viz., the close sympathy and alliance between Conn and the nations west of the Shannon, particularly towards the North.

On the night on which this mighty Conn of the Hundred Fights was born at Tara, a powerful western god came out from the Olnemactian land to welcome the infant. Before him, as he travelled through Mid-Erin, brake forth as a road the great mounded ridge which traverses the midland counties, and is called the Esker Riada.

In the following chapter the reader will be able to form some conception of the character attributed to Conn,—of his reckless courage, his fierceness, impetuosity, overbearing wrathfulness, fits of savage gloom, affectionateness, and the enthusiastic loyalty and admiration which he inspired. He is thus not much dissimilar to Saul, in the Jewish account of the early Kings of Israel.

* See Part xii.

CHAPTER III.

WARS OF CONN WITH THE SOUTH OF IRELAND.

DURING the reign of Conn, the hegemony of Munster was disputed between three powerful nations, who had succeeded in reducing to this point the, no doubt, many independent tribes of more ancient times. These were the Corca Lewy, the Children of Heber, and the Ernai, or the Clan Dēga. One of the greater heroes of the Milesian cycle was Ith, the uncle of Milesius. His son Lewy, surnamed Laid-Ken, or Head of Poetry, of whom that quaint story is told, of causing, inadvertently, the death of his wife, accompanied the sons of Milesius in their invasion of Ireland, and became the founder of the first of these three nations, the Corca Lewy, or Children of Lewy. During the progress of the dim mythical Milesian record, we find the Corca Lewy a powerful and royal sept, occupying the south of Ireland, and, from time to time, furnishing Kings of Tara, but with gradually lessening power.

The nation which claimed descent from Heber, son of Milesius, seem at first to have occupied the south midland counties of Ireland—(the tomb of Heber is at Geashill, in the King's County)—whence they were driven southward by the growing might of the Heremonians, or Children of Heremon,* who originally occupied Leinster, their power stretching along the sea coast,

* The so-called Dúns of Heremon, but which are really the tombs of heroes belonging to his race, are found in this part of Ireland.—See "Four Masters."

towards the Boyne. The tomb of Heremon is at Arget Ros, upon the Nore, and most of his achievements are confined to this portion of Ireland. Of course, none of these Milesian heroes can be regarded as historical characters, but that at the dawn of history, nations claiming descent from them, and tribal confederacies impressed with their names, occupied certain territories in the island, more or less distinctly defined, is tolerably plain. As the Heremonian nations of Leinster spread to the north-west and west, they came into collision with the Children of Heber, who, being worsted, fell back upon and displaced the Corca Lewy originally holding a great part of Munster.

About the time of the commencement of our era, a new nation forced itself into Munster; this was the Ernai, or Clan Dēga, originally settled in the west of Ulster, but driven out thence by the Clanna Rury, or the Red Branch, under Congall Clareena, R. H., B.C. 79. —See p. 184. This invading nation made common cause with the Corca Lewy against the Heberian tribes, reducing them to a subordinate position. In the time of Coun the Clan Dēga seem to have occupied the modern counties of Clare, Cork, and Limerick, the territory of the Corca Lewy was conterminous with that of Cork; while the possessions of the Siol Heber, or Seed of Heber, reached thence, eastward, into Leinster, and northwards to a point which cannot be defined.

Now, however, in the reign of Conn, a powerful and ambitious King rose to ascendancy amongst the Heberian nations, assuming an attitude of hostility to the monarch, and strengthening himself with alliances out of Leinster and Ulster, amongst the families most

hostile to Conn. This King was Mogha Neid,* whose son, the illustrious Owen Mór, surnamed the Resplendent, was fostered in the province of Leinster. The Corca Lewy and the Ernai, however, supported the authority of the King of Tara, and their Kings, Maic Nia, prince of the Corca Lewy, and Conairy, afterwards King of all Ireland, married daughters of the monarch. So powerful, however, was the confederacy formed by Mogha Neid, that, in spite of Conn's support, he succeeded in defeating both nations. He expelled Maic-Nia and Conairy out of Munster, who, with their adherents, fled northwards to Tara, invoking the assistance of the Ard-Rie.

In spite of the fact that Lewy Mac-Con, son of Maic-Nia, by Conn's daughter, Sabia, was subsequently elected King of Ireland, the Corca Lewy henceforward shine with a steadily diminishing prestige. In the dawn of history we find their realms extending over the whole of the county of Cork, and, I think, the south of Kerry. In the time of the Normans, their territory ran no further westward than the Bandon river. In the convulsions consequent on the Norman invasion, and when their tribe name was altered to O'Driscoll, their territory was still further reduced by the incursions of the O'Mahonies, the O'Sullivans, and the O'Donovans, who were driven out of Limerick and Tipperary by the Earls of Desmond, and, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, the possessions of this once royal tribe was reduced to a few parishes surrounding Baltimore, where was their chief castle. In this reign,

* Mogha Neid, like Cuculain, is evidently a surname. It means the Servant of Ned the war-god. C.f. the Homeric *θεράποντες Ἀργείων*.

Florence O'Driscoll, their then chief, took part with the Northern Earls, O'Neill and O'Donnell, shared their defeat under the walls of Kinsale, after which, his estates were confiscated, and this noble and historic clan faded utterly out of Ireland.

To return: this ancient King, Mogha Neid, without waiting for the vengeance of the monarch, summoned to his standard the whole "rising-out"* of the south of Ireland, and assisted by the Children of Cathair Mōr, out of Leinster, also by the Clanna Basna,† a renowned race, of whom more anon, and who, true to the nature of the strange organization to which they belonged, fought in this war from their own hand, marched northwards into the mid-lands, invading the territories of the monarch. Conn, on the other hand, supported by the north of Ireland, though but grudgingly and partially by Ulster, marched to meet him, and, in a great battle, at Moy Tulaing, in the King's County, routed the southern confederacy, and slew the brave southern aspirant, Mogha Neid. On his death, Owen Mōr, his son, assumed the command, and, though immediately afterwards compelled to retreat, seems to have succeeded in keeping possession that night of the field of battle. That night, too, Owen and his warriors interred the slain King, clad still in his armour, and laid his sword and war-mace by his side. At this

* This is a literal translation of the Irish word corresponding somewhat to "*posse comitatus*." It was common in Anglo-Irish phraseology three centuries since.

† This was the chief sept of the *Fianna Eireen*, the *Fian**, or Hero-Hunters of Ireland. They form a sort of warlike organization of the nature of a military guild, and interpenetrate the history of the ensuing ages. Their history and achievements form the *Osianic cycle*.

point, the historian quotes verbatim one of the ancient bardic poems of unknown antiquity, on which the history is founded :

*" Mogha Neid lies in his grave upon Moy Tulain,
With his spears resting on his shoulders,
With his war-mace once sprightly in action,
His helmet and his sword."*

The next day Owen with his broken host retreated into Munster, but not without sustaining a severe defeat in Eiley, Co. Tipperary, in which Owen was wounded and borne off by his warriors with difficulty.

Now, first, in anything like large and imposing proportions, appears that strange warlike organization, to sing whose praises the bards forsook not only all the ancient heroes, but all subsequent kings and warriors, concentrating upon them, their sufferings, adventures, and triumphs, the imagination of the whole island ; thus creating that Ossianic literature,* fragments of which, even at the present day, wander amongst the peasantry of Ireland and Scotland. This organization was the Fianna Eireen, the Fians, or Hero-Hunters of Erin, now first looming up amid the large, obscure politics and wars of the age, seen dimly as in twilight, for the sun of their glory and greatness has not yet arisen. Through the gloom we hear a noise as of the tread of giants, and distinguish shapes of Titanic warriors moving through the land, with uncouth ancient names, Irgreen and Morna, Dubna and Corc, Tren-Mör and Cool, the dim-seen, immense ancestors of Ossian and his heroes. The more ancient bards,

* See Part x., chap. 10, and Part xi.

those who were most in sympathy with ethnic ideas and the old traditions of the race, do not derive the origin of this breed of warriors from the blood of Milith. They were of the seed of the giants, the mundane posterity of Cairbry the Atticot, who, with his divine and semi-divine warriors, slaughtered at Moy Cru all the princes of the Milesian line.

Cool, father of the celebrated Finn mac Cool, captain of the Leinster Fians, now declared for the Southern, and marched upon Tara, but at Cuncha, now Castle Knock, near Dublin, was met by the monarch, who had with him the Connaught Fians, under the command of Goll mac Morna.* Here, Cool was defeated and slain. The Clanna Morna now endeavoured to establish for ever their sovereignty over all the Fians of Eiré, by the extermination of the descendants of Basna. Their trackers and assassins went through all Leinster executing the bloody decree. Finn was at this time a babe in his cradle. Two mysterious women suddenly appeared at the palace of Cool, and took away the child. In the deep forests of the Slieve Bloom mountains these heroines reared the great captain of the Fianna Eireen, Finn† mac Cool, the father of Ossian.

Having destroyed for ever, as they deemed, the renowned Clanna Basna, Conn and his warriors attacked Owen Mōr, and drove him through Munster. There is a sort of vast epic picture in this part of the bardic account of the war. Conn climbs to the brow

* These movements are fully described by O'Curry.—See preface to *Battle of Moy Lena*.

† The Fingall of Macpherson.

of the red-haired Man-garta,* and gazes over Munster, marks the rich plains watered by the Lee, dotted with sheep and kine, and, at the sources of the river, sees his beaten foe cowering from the wrath of the Northerns, and the nobles of Munster standing back from him through fear.

One more battle, on the banks† of the Kenmare river, Owen fought with his invincible antagonists, and then fled into Berehaven, where, with a few followers, he took ship and made his escape to Spain.

Then, Conn, having conquered the whole of the South of Ireland, established his sons-in-law, Maic-Nia and Conairy in the sovereignty of Munster, depressing all the princes of the Heberian line; and, in Leinster, drove the sons of Cathair Mór from the sovereignty, setting up Culboy as his regent.

Thus, Conn became undisputed monarch, and Goll mac Morna undisputed captain of the Fians; for, of Goll it was sung by the ancient bard ‡—

“It was by him fell Cool the Great,
In the battle of Cuncha of embattled hosts,
What they fought this stout battle for,
Was the Fian leadership of Fail.”

Then the historian goes on to summarize the after history of Goll mac Morna, victor in the battle of Cuncha, and Finn, the preserved child of Cool, then slain :

* Mount Mangarten.

† Cloch Barra. Here, Eadane, the goddess, substituted rocks for Owen and his warriors; themselves she conveyed away to Bere Island. This Eadane was the weird bride of the pre-historic King, Eocha Airem.—See p. 191.

‡ Pub. Oss. Soc., Vol. iv., p. 291.

"The victorious Cool had a son,
The blood-shedding Finn of hard weapons.
Finn and Goll the far-renowned,
Mightily they waged war."

"After that they made peace,
Finn and Goll of the hundred deeds,
Until the Banf* Shinna fell,
On the plain of Temair Luchra.†"

Of the history of Finn, how he restored and made paramount in Erin the Clanna Basna, and held strongly the Fian leadership of Fail, I shall write hereafter at some length.

I may here remark that Goll mac Morna received his name of Goll; *i.e.*, Luscus, or One-eyed, in consequence of a wound received in this battle of Cuncha from a warrior of the Clanna Looney, of Tara, named Luchet. His first name was *Æd*.

Hardly had Conn established himself in his sovereignty, when, once more, the note of rebellion was heard, "louder, clearer, deadlier than before." The stubborn and unsubduable Owen returned from Spain with an army of ten thousand Spaniards, under the command of *Fræch Milisa*. The Spanish monarch had received him hospitably, as a descendant of their common ancestor,‡ given him his daughter Bera in marriage, supplied him with troops and a fleet of galleys, that he might return and contend once more for his ancestral dominions, if not for the sovereignty of all Ireland. A pretty dramatic

* I do not know the history of this personage.

† This was a fortress of the *Ernai* in Kerry. It was sacked once by *Cuculain* and the *Ultonians*.

‡ *I.e.*, *Milesius*.

touch is added to the description of their parting. The Spanish monarch laughingly bade his son-in-law take the island in tow and moor it off the Spanish coast, so that their homes might still be together.

After experiencing a terrible storm* in the bay of Biscay, Owen reached Bantry Bay in safety, and gave the name of his bride to the harbour, since called from her Berehaven. Thence he despatched messengers to every province in Ireland, and galleys along the sea-coast announcing his arrival, and stirring up a new war against the monarch. All the south of Ireland was in a ferment. The Heberian princes of Munster rose in rebellion, and the sons-in-law of Conn fled to Tara. In Leinster, the lieutenants of Conn were put to flight, and the sons of Cathair Mór restored to the sovereignty. The Ulster Red Branch rose too, and expelled the adherents of Conn.

Alarmed and dismayed by the extent of this great mutiny, Conn, at first, sent overtures to the southern monarch, proposing peace, and that Owen's authority should prevail over the whole of the south of Ireland, from a line drawn through Meath from the mouth of the Liffey and Ath-a-Clia Dub-linn to Ath-a-Clia Mara, i.e., from Dublin to Galway.† That some such arrangement was at this time made is quite possible, but the bards, after their wont, adorned the pact with gigantic

* The bard celebrates enthusiastically the stubborn valour of the rowers, and how, against the wind and clashing waves, ever leaped forward the white oars, constant-going, steady, unhesitating. The sea itself, too, with its contentious billows, wins full praise; and he describes how the wind returned sullenly to his place, not having received honour from the sea, which, on the contrary, rose against and struggled with him.

† This result was not attained, according to Keatinge, until Conn had been defeated in ten battles, of Broma, Sampaita, Greina, &c.

episodes. The long ridge, formed in remote times by the action of the sea, which runs across a considerable portion of the middle of Ireland, was described by them as having been erected by Conn and Owen as a great and lasting march of their territories. This ridge was called the Esker Riada. In the bardic literature, the usual title of the North of Ireland is Leth Cuinn, Conn's Half, and, of the South, Leth Moha, the Half of Owen, one of whose names was Moh Nuagat.

After not many months, however, Owen found that the dues of the ships putting into Dublin, on the north side of the Liffey, exceeded those coming in on the south, and he demanded that an equal division should be made between them of the whole dues of the port. This avaricious and unjust claim was naturally resisted by Conn, and again the note of rebellion and civil war was sounded, again the rising-out of all the south of Ireland, joined by the nations of Leinster, marched to Moy Lena, and there encamping, collected the tributes of all the centre of Ireland. Once more the Red Branch came together, and crossing the Boyne, wasted all Bregia up to the confines of Tara, which was guarded by that division of the Fians named, from their office and duties, the Four Pillars of Tara, and to whom was committed the guardianship of the sacred hill, thus constituting, to compare small things with great, a sort of Pretorian guard for the monarch and for Tara. When this tumult arose, Conn was in the country west of the Shannon, in the midst of his ancestral tribes, amongst whom, as a boy, he had been fostered. Then, to the monarch's ears, from afar, came the sounds of revolution, the low, hoarse murmur of rebellion, tumultuous and swelling. Hastily collecting the

Clanna Morna and his Connaught adherents, he crossed the Shannon, and resolved to defeat his enemies in detail, and to attack the Red Branch before they could effect a junction with the Southern host. Then, as the bard sang, it was like a ship sailing between two mighty fierce-crested billows of the main, when Conn marched through the midst of Erin between the Clanna Rury and the host of Owen. Successfully evading Owen on the right, he marched to Bregia,* to defend Tara and its treasures. There he attacked the Red Branch, being unable to effect a junction with the Pillars of Tara, and seeing before him all Meath and Bregia covered with a low, broad, lurid flame of conflagration, for, between the Liffey and the Boyne all the land was, as it were, streets of plunderers, and the lowing of cattle and the cries of captives mingled with the shouts of the northern devastators. In the ensuing battle, Conn himself charged at the head of his men, on foot, like a common spearman. Here the bard gives a fine picture of the slender, glistening forests of spears stretched out beyond the glittering circles of the shields, and, behind the shields, fearless faces, bright with the light of battle,—the faces of heroes, who had upon them no fear of death, or of shortness of life ; also, of Conn, the rudder of the provinces, the quick-journeying keeper of Tara, in his crouched rush of a champion charging in front of his warriors. The Red Branch could not await his onset ; they broke, and fled to the Boyne. The next day, Conn restored every cow to its cow-keep, and every farmer to his

* The territory between the Liffey and the Boyne.

holding, and set the feet of every captive on the road that led homeward. Joined now by the Pillars of Tara, he retraced his steps and encamped before Moy Lēna, fronting the great southern host.

That night, sang the bards, Conn, or his druids and sooth-sayers for him, heard, far away, the three royal waves of Fohla roaring for joy, hailing the High-King to their relief, the wave of Toth, the wave of Rury, and the long, slow, hoarse wave of Cleena. And worthy, indeed, sang they, was he to be so greeted, the mighty and victorious Conn of the Hundred Battles, for his march was the rush of a spring-tide and his journeying the evacuation of territories, and the earth was filled with his greatness and his glory.

Nevertheless, Conn was troubled when he saw the fewness of his own warriors and the vast array of the great southern host, in which were ten thousand Spaniards, all the Munster nobles and their men, and the sons of Cathair Mōr with the chivalry of Leinster. Then uprose before him the Kings of Connaught, reminding him of his own prowess, and how they had ever been true to his father, Felimy Rectmar, and his grand-father, Tuhall Tectmar; and how he had been a boy amongst them, so that all the youth of Connaught were his foster-brothers, and the veteran warriors were his tutors and foster-fathers: "And we swear to thee, O Conn," said they, "that sooner shall the sea overrun the land, and the solid canopy of heaven fall, than will we yield one foot to the might of this haught southern King."

But they did not relieve the monarch's gloom, who answered, that their words were the ravings of men of no understanding. So Conn sat down in his wrath,

gnawing the spear-tree of his spear, until his teeth^x screeched against the brazen head.* At length he called his own brothers, Fiecha Finn and Fiecha Swee, and sent them as ambassadors to Owen Mōr, offering to surrender to him the whole of Munster and Leinster, and also "my sword-supporting territory of Ulster," retaining only Tara and Connaught. This proposal Owen Mōr and the Southern Kings insolently refused, after which, the brothers extolled Conn before the faces of their enemies, and denounced the rebellion. By order of Owen Mōr and his Council the brothers were hanged upon the top of the Esker Riada. It was still night when the news was brought to Conn of the murder of his brothers, and he cried out and cast himself on the ground, weeping like a silly girl who has lost her first-born son. Anon, he gave orders to his warriors to arm, and, at day-dawn, attacked the host of the Southerners. The particulars of the battle are not recorded, but the bard describes at length the terrible appearance of the field afterwards, the blue-black faces and protruding bowels, the shattered shields and swords, and the hands hacked on the back. Amongst the dead was Owen Mōr the Resplendent, with Conn's spear through his side. The great Southern host was completely destroyed, and the authority of Conn extended anew over Leinster and Munster.

The foregoing I have introduced into this work in order that the reader may have some knowledge of the large ardent style affected by Irish bardic historians, and the mode in which the characters and events of

* *I.e.*, he chewed down the spear-tree from the haft to the blade.

an age group themselves in that mind into an epic sequence and harmony. Unhistoric, doubtless, it in great part is, but we can easily imagine what a real, vital, animating influence upon the minds of our ancestors their history must have exercised, when regarded so imaginatively and with such emotion. A young Irish prince or noble in pre-Norman days, well-educated in the profane literature of his country, regarding the past, saw, as in perspective, a vast and far-reaching history thronged with innumerable defined characters, heroic or kingly, scenes of suffering or of triumph, large epic arrangements and continuities. He, therefore, loved his country and honoured his ancestors in a way of which we can with difficulty form a conception in times like these, when the treatment of the past has fallen altogether into the hands of critical persons and archaeologists, men whose labours are indeed indispensable, but who certainly do not fire the heart of youth with generous emotions, rouse the passions, and educate the imagination.

For, be it remembered, that the whole of the bardic history was so treated, it being, in fact, a series of epics running backward through time, and all fully believed to be veritable history and a simple record of the achievements and characters of their ancestors, both by the bards who transmitted and taught, and by the youths whom they educated. Of poetry, as distinguished from metrical composition, those ancient bards knew nothing. The bardic literature, profoundly poetic though it be, was, in their eyes, history and nothing more. As history it was originally composed, and as history bound in the chains of metre, that it might not be lost or dissipated in passing through the

minds of men, and as history it was translated into prose and committed to parchment. While creative thought worked upon a scale without parallel in the history of the world, no man knew that he created. Indeed, those singing men without number of ancient Erin, were but, as it were, strings of a vast spiritual harp, upon which the genius of the isle and race, rapt and unregarding, ever played.

After a stormy reign of thirty years, during which he seems to have been engaged in ceaseless wars, Conn was at last slain by the Ultonians in the battle of Tuath Amross. On the death of Conn, the ascendancy of Tara seems to have been pretty generally acknowledged over Ireland with the exception of Ulster.

During his reign Hadrian erected a great frontier mearing extending between Newcastle and Carlisle, dividing Roman from Pictish Britain. To regard these Roman walls as military defences is absurd to the last degree. They never could have been anything of the kind. They were great boundaries, or mearings, whose size might impress more strongly on the minds of nations the sacredness of the treaties under which they were erected, and the power and rights of the god Terminus. I shall have occasion to point out various ways in which the Irish were affected by the proximity of Rome. In this instance Rome was affected by the customs of their Celtic opponents.

The practice of erecting those great mearings is common in early Irish history. In the present reign, we see traces of it in the legend that the Esker Riada was raised by Conn and Owen as a march of their territories. Similarly,—see Part xii., chap. 1,—the three Collas having driven the Red Branch into the east of

T

Ulster, erected the great mearing still known as the Danes' Cast, in the vicinity of Newry.

The mearing of a territory is often mentioned in the literature as something huge and stupendous. Thus, the chariot of Cuculain, struggling against the earth-demons,* ploughs such a trench. Of course, besides the rampart, there was the foss in all such erections.

CHAPTER IV.

CALEDONIA INVADED BY THE DAL RIADA.

145 A.D. Conairy II. His wife was Samair, daughter of Conn. He had been driven out of Munster by Mogha Neid, and thence fled to Tara, after which he became one of the chief captains of Conn's host.

With this Conairy commences a series of events destined to exercise an influence over all the British Isles, and to affect the history of civilization and religion for centuries in this portion of Europe. One of his sons, Cairbry Riada, having established himself in the sovereignty of that territory which is now called Antrim, founded a family known as the Dal Riada, or Children of Riada.

In the third generation from Cairbry this nation, by marriage or conquest, effected a settlement in the

* In the battle of Gaura Orohill, the Sorceress stirs up the earth itself against the hero, and rolls the solid plain, with its rocks, in billows against his chariot.

adjoining coast of Scotland. Backed, as it frequently was, by the whole force at the disposal of the Ard-Rie of Ireland, this thin point of vantage was driven deeper and deeper into Scotland, till the Scotch Dal Riada became a numerous and powerful nation, extending their conquests in every direction.

The authority of the Irish bardic literature as to the exodus of the Dal Riada, is confirmed by the testimony of the venerable Bede. Of course Bede knew nothing about the matter himself, and wrote from the authority of the Irish historians, who alone had any means of becoming acquainted with or transmitting the fact, but his testimony is valuable as showing that in his time that was received and admitted, for which if we examine our own monuments, we cannot procure a really ancient authority. This fact tends to strengthen the reliability of the ancient history of Ireland, showing that it was formulated at an early date, and close to the events narrated. In the wake of this military exodus, followed in the sixth century, the apostle of the Picts, the great St. Colum Kille or Columba, with the consequent Christianization of Caledonia, and of Saxon England, and the foundation of the Monastery of Iona, which for centuries was the religious metropolis of the north-west of Europe.

It was not until a late mediæval age that the name of Scotia began to be applied to Caledonia, but with this Dal-Riadie colony commenced the series of events which ultimately transferred to that country and its inhabitants the names by which Ireland and the Irish were for centuries known. I think it probable that the west of Scotland was from still more ancient times inhabited by a people of Irish race and language.

The intimate connection between Alba and Ulster in the heroic cycles is so pronounced, and the fixed and stereotyped character of that literature so demonstrable in many ways, that this is rendered probable. It has been pointed out by the best living antiquarian* that the name of the warrior who opposed Agricola at the foot of the Grampian Hills is Irish,† whereas the Picts were of Scandinavian or Teutonic race. We might, therefore, presume either that the Irish were then powerful in Alba, or that the Ulster Irish united with the Picts in their opposition to Rome. At a later date we will find Picts and Irish combined in a close alliance against the same power.

At this point, too, I may refer to the fact of the preservation in the west of Scotland, though in a confused and chaotic form, of much of the Irish heroic literature, rude ballad cycles, orally recited and transmitted, which ultimately took form in the so-called epics of Ossian, published, and in great part composed or readjusted by Macpherson, but deriving their sublimity, strange fascination, and elevation of moral tone from the spirit inherent in the whole of that literature, whether Irish or Albic. In Macpherson's work, however, the chronology and succession in time of events and persons are completely disarranged. The heroes of the Ultonian cycle, *tempore Christi*, are mixed up with those of the Ossianic, who flourished in the third century of our era, and in the reigns of Cormac mac Art, and his son, Cairbry of the Liffey.

* See Reeves' Edition of Adamnan's Life of St. Columba.

† See Reeves' Edition of Adamnan's Life of St. Columba, p. 160. The Latin-Irish name of Londonderry is *Roboretum Galgachi*.

To Macpherson, however, we must do this justice, that he had the merit to perceive, even in the debased and floating ballads of the Highlands, traces of some past greatness and sublimity of thought, and to understand, he, for the first time, how much more they meant than what met the ear. But in Scotland, in the eighteenth century, the historical origin of the ballads, their epic continuity and coherence, and the position in time and place of the heroes whom they praised, had been long lost. Thus released from the curb of history, he gave free rein to the imagination, and in the conventional literary language of sublimity, gave full expression to the feelings that arose within him, as to him, pondering over those ballads, their gigantesque element developed into a greatness and solemnity, and their vagueness and indeterminateness into that misty immensity and weird obscurity which, as constituent factors in a poem, not as back-ground, form one of the elements of the false sublime. Either not seeing the literary necessity of definiteness, or having no such abundant and ordered literature as we possess, upon which to draw for details, and being too conscientious to invent facts, however he might invent language, he published his epics of Ossian—false indeed to the original, but true to himself, and to the feelings excited by meditation upon them. This done, he had not sufficient courage to publish also an authentic version of the rude, homely originals—a step which, in that hard critical age, would have been to expose himself and his country to swift contempt. The thought of the great lexicographer riding rough-shod over the poor mountain songs which he loved, and the fame which he had already acquired, deterred and

dissuaded him, if he had ever any such intention, until the opportunity was past.

The age and the heroes around whom that Ossianic cycle revolves have, in the history of Ireland, a definite position in time; their battles, characters, several achievements, relationships, and pedigrees; their Dûns, and trysting-places, and tombs; their wives, musicians, and bards; their tributes, and sufferings, and triumphs; their internecine and other wars—are all fully and clearly described in the Irish Ossianic literature. They still remain demanding adequate treatment, when we arrive at the age of Cairbry of the Liffey, King of Ireland in the third century of the Christian era. In Macpherson all this has been forgotten for the sake of a vague representation of the more sublime aspects of the cycle, and the meretricious seductions of a form of composition easy to write and easy to read, and to which the unwary or unwise often award praise to which it has no claim.

How much sterner are the canons of historical verification in the present century than in the last, we see in the fact that Gibbon uses Macpherson's work as an authority proving the noble, simple spirit of the Caledonians as contrasted with that of their Roman foes. Gibbon, indeed, was in a sense right, but right only by a fluke. A bardic literature collected from oral tradition in the eighteenth century, might have reflected the spirit of any other time as well as that of Galgachus. We know now that this heroic note characterized the poetry of all those northern nations whom the Romans and Gibbon so contemned.

CHAPTER V.

BATTLE OF MAH MUOREEMA.

165 A.D. Art the Solitary, son of Conn of the Hundred Fights.

In the eleventh year of his reign a great war disturbed the south of Ireland. The modern county of Cork was held by a nation descended, as their bards stated, from Ith, the uncle of Milesius. The King of this nation, Lewy Mac-Con, whose father, Maic-Nia,* was once driven Tara-ward by Mogha Neid, contended for the hegemony of Munster, with Aileel Olúm, son of that Owen Mór who was defeated and slain by Conn in the battle of Moy Lēna. Art supported the pretensions of the latter, while the Ithian prince had upon his side his birth,† the support of the Ernai, and the aid of Lewy Laga, the greatest warrior of the age, who joined Mac-Con against his own brother. In the great battle of Kin-febra, however, the coalition was completely defeated by Aileel‡ Olúm.

186 A.D. Battle of Kin-febra.§

Lewy Mac-Con fled out of the country after his defeat, but eventually returns into Ireland with an army||

* See p. 277.

† He was grandson of Conn by his daughter Sabia.

‡ The final supremacy of the Heberian over the other nations of the south, for they finally almost obliterated the rest, is to be attributed to the closeness with which, after their first great overthrow, by Conn, they adhered to Tara and its Kings. By this policy, they secured the hegemony of Munster, but never gave kings to Ireland.

§ Slieve Riach, south of Kilmallock, Co. Cork.

|| Even one hundred years before this, expelled Irish Kings were accus-

collected out of Britain and Gaul, his adherents in Ireland, in the meantime not having been idle. Abandoning Munster, he sailed to Galway, where, landing, he resolved to abandon the former object of his ambition, and to strike for Tara and the Ard-Rieship. The reviving Clanna Basna* joined him here, with the insurgent Ernai and his other adherents. The combined armies set out for Tara, but were met on the plain of Mah Mucreema† by the monarch, Art. In the ensuing battle the royal troops were utterly routed, and the King was slain.

The descendants of Art never forgave the Fians for their conduct at this crisis, they, constituting a sort of Prætorian guard, supposed to support the authority of the Kings of Tara. In the great battle of Gabra, in which the power of this formidable military league was finally broken, the royal troops roused their own wrath by recalling the treachery of Finn and his warriors at this time. The then monarch exhorted his warriors not to suffer one of the Fians to survive; but while he yet spake—

“Barrán suddenly exclaimed,

‘Remember Mah Mucreema, remember Art.’”‡

tomed to seek for aid in the adjoining countries. Cf. The Irish *regulus* who sought assistance from Agricola.

* As the historical existence of this military league, the Fianna Eireen, cannot be proved, I must allow the reader to admit or reject all references to them, according to his own judgment, aided by such considerations and suggestions as I make further on. It will be remembered that in the reign of Conn the Clanna Basna were conquered in the battle of Cuncha, and their very extermination attempted. But, under the reign of Art, through the genius and courage of Finn, they had become again powerful. But whatever historical reality underlies the Fenian Saga, has been so tossed and torn by the imagination and fancy, that beyond their mere existence, the race of the Fianna Eireen can have little more predicated concerning them.

† Near Athenry, Co. Galway.

‡ Pub. Oss. Soc.—Battle of Gabra.

Amid the mythical embroidery with which the bards loved to adorn their battle-scenes, we read how Art, true to his surname, wandered alone, meditating, on the eve of the battle, into the heart of an adjoining forest, where he came upon a company of the Fir-Shee peoples of Erin, *i.e.*, the gods, or Tuatha De Danān, working industriously at a mighty forge, where they manufactured magic weapons for his foes. The snoring of the bellows and the loud ringing of the hammers, the screech of the files and hissing of red iron in keeves of water, make a fine and animated picture.*

His wife, too, dreamed of his death, and of the great glory and renown of their son, Cormac mac Art.

Though Art in this war was sustained by the sons of Aileel Olúm, he was opposed by Lewy Laga, brother of the same Aileel, and by him was slain in this battle. Lewy Laga afterwards made peace with the son of Art, and was his right hand in his wars with Ulster.

In this battle, seventeen sons of Aileel Olúm, legitimate and illegitimate, were slain.† The terrible destruction wreaked on the southern contingent in the battle, was the theme of an abundant threnodial bardic literature. There is extant a long poem called the Lament of Aileel Olúm for his sons, containing adequate material for an epical representation of the battle, to which may be added the contents of a fine tale called the Battle of Mah Mucreema.

Of the sons of Aileel Olúm, three became founders

* See the prose tale called Battle of Mah Mucreema.

† The power of Tara and the Ard-Ríship in Munster are here apparent.

of historic houses : Owen, ancestor of the ruling* families of South Munster, or Desmond ; Cas,† of those of North Munster, or Thomond ; and Cian, ancestor of the Cian-achta, who, in the reign of Cormac mac Art, were transplanted into Ulster, to maintain there the royal authority against the declining, but still formidable, kinsmen of Cuculain, the Red Branch, or Clanna Rury, *i.e.*, the Ultonians, so often alluded to in this history.

CHAPTER VI.

LEWY MAC-CON FERGUS.

A.D. 182. Lewy mac-Con. He was the grandson of Conn of the Hundred Fights, by his daughter, Sabia, wife of that Munster prince, Maic-Nia, who had been driven out of the South by Mogha Neid. I think it probable that, at this time, the bardic and druidic traditions were beginning to feel the stress of the new civilization, which the mighty influence of Rome was steadily forcing on the north of Europe. If this be so, then Lewy mac-Con seems to have typified in this age the old habits and customs ; Art, his rival, and Cormac, the son of Art, being, in all the bardic literature, associated with something new and unwonted. This accounts for the hostility expressed towards Lewy mac-Con by the monks and the more Christianized

* The Owen-Achta, or Eugenian tribes.

† The Dal-Cas, whence the O'Briens.

bards, and the favour shown to him in the more ethnic traditions and tales. He is represented in the latter as having been murdered at the instigation of Cormac mac Art, at a place in Leinster called Gort-an-Oir, while engaged in the distribution of gifts and prizes to the bards of that province. Also, it must be noted, that his victory at Mah Mucreema was gained by the aid of those prime favourites of the anti-Christian bards, Finn mac Cool and the heroes of the Ossianic cycle.

225 A.D. Fergus, King of the Red Branch.

Art left a son, the renowned Cormac mac Art. By the aid of Teague, son of Cian, one of the seventeen sons of Aileel Olúm, slain along with Art in the battle of Mah Mucreema, and a redoubtable southern warrior much renowned in song, Lewy Laga,* Cormac overthrew Fergus and his northern confederacy, and seized Tara and the Ard-Rieship. Upon Teague and his descendants Cormac conferred a large territory wrested from the Red Branch, in the neighbourhood of Lough Neagh, apparently with the object of introducing into Ulster a strong tribe, loyal to himself and antagonistic to the formidable Clanna Rury. This territory became known as that of the Cian-achta, *i.e.*, of the descendants of Cian, father of this Teague. The Cian-achta play an honourable part in all the subsequent history of the North of Ireland.

* Brother of Aileel Olúm. There is a fine tale of how Cormac visited the old but indomitable warrior, now living in a remote and solitary place, and of the peace struck between them. In Cormac's war with the Ultonians, Lewy Laga slew Fergus and his two brothers.

CHAPTER VII.

CORMAC* MAC ART UA CONN, REX HIBERNIÆ,
A.D. 227.

ARRIVED now at the reign of this King, I propose to pause for a moment, and collect various floating threads of history or tradition, which, at this point, will best bear to be handled and woven into the narrative. Although we possess no verifiable† contemporary evidence with regard to this celebrated King, yet I think I shall be able hereafter to show that the canons of interpretation adopted by historians in their treatment of the historical monuments and traditions of other nations, being applied here, will bring the reign of Cormac mac Art fairly within the historical period. I may add, too, that the general consensus of opinion of Irish antiquarians, including that of Petrie—(*vide* Antiquities of Tara)—whose archæological work ever indicates the utmost prudence and caution, and that of Dr. Graves, Bishop of Limerick—(*vide* Hermathené, Vol. v., p. 209)—points to the same conclusion.‡ Beyond the fact that Cormac reigned, probably, at the date entered in the annals, and in the genealogical order in which he appears, we, however, know little or

* Cormac, son of Art, grandson of Conn.

† The evidence being bardic is cast in an epic and dramatic form, and is, besides, incapable of being traced with certainty to a contemporary origin.

‡ Petrie accepts his historical existence, and all the events of his reign,—these, merely annalistic, which are recorded by Tihernah. Dr. Graves does the same, and further regards it as quite probable that he may have actually been the author of works attributed to him.

nothing with absolute certainty as to his personality, or the events and character of his reign. Innumerable tales and poems, filling a great space in the domain of the bardic literature, revolve round the name of Cormac mac Art, but, inasmuch as at this distance of time, it is impossible to explain the mode and time of their genesis, the historian is obliged, regretfully, to forego their use, or to employ them for a limited and special purpose.

It must, at the same time, be remembered, that a powerful King, affecting deeply the imagination of his age, would naturally leave upon it a strong and durable impression. When we perceive in Greek and Græco-Roman art how a distinct type of humanity or godhood, once formed, perpetuates itself through many centuries, with slight variations, we can understand how, in literature also—even literature wholly imaginative—a distinct and vigorous personality, once fully grasped by the public imagination, may, and probably will, for centuries, preserve its most characteristic features. This argument I would not use to strengthen the reliability of imaginative literature dealing with very remote personalities, but think it may be fairly employed by those who would glean from the general tenor of the literature, relating to certainly historic Kings, large facts illustrating the character of their reign, the task being undertaken cautiously and without dogmatism.

We have seen that the Irish bardic literature which treats of Cuculain, reproduces the chief martial feature of the age, viz., the war-chariot, therefore, that the literature which encircles Cormac mac Art, coming more than two centuries later, should contain historic

fact, is not only probable, but, I think, according to customary rules of interpretation, all but certain.*

Conn of the Hundred Fights, his son, Art the Solitary, and his grandson, Cormac mac Art, surnamed Ul-fada, or the Long-armed, stand out in the bardic literature with a clearness and fulness, not unlike that of Saul, David, and Solomon in Hebrew history. Indeed, their characters are not unlike. Conn, like Saul, is headstrong and passionate, a heroic character, indeed, but all too rough and fierce. Art resembles David in the religious and meditative side of his character, though, otherwise, the resemblance does not hold. In Cormac, like Solomon, the royal stem, hardened in tempestuous wars and watered in the bloodshed of a hundred battles, seems at last to burst into flower. No language can be too glowing for the bards in which to describe his glory and magnificence, the sumptuousness of his palaces at Tara, the splendour of his hospitality, his regal munificence, his wealth and beauty, and the strength of his army. Three conspicuously handsome men, they related, had appeared in Erin before the coming of the Talkend; the first, Angus Og, son of the Dagda, genius of beauty, music, and love; the second, Conairy Mōr, the son of Eterskel; and the third, Cormac mac Art. In the vellum manuscript, called the Book of Ballymote, occurs the following description of his person and attire, copied thereinto from an ancient lost MS. called the Book of Uaconbail, a description of unknown authorship and antiquity, but, doubtless, in the main, representing

* See Part ii., chap. 2.

truly the impression made by Cormac on the mind of his own and of succeeding ages :—

“ His hair slightly curled and of gold colour. A scarlet shield of engraved devices, with golden loops and clasps of silver. A wide-folding purple mantle around him, with a gem-set gold brooch on his breast. A gold torque around his neck. A white-collared *lena*, embroidered with gold, upon him. A girdle, with golden clasps and studded with precious stones, around his waist. Two sandals of gold net-work with golden buckles. Two spears with golden sockets and many red bronze rivets in his hand, while he stood in the manly glow of beauty, without defect or blemish. One might think that it was a shower of pearls that were set in his mouth. His lips were rubies. His symmetrical body white as snow. His cheek like the mountain ash berry ; his eyes like the sloe ; his brows and eye-lashes were like the sheen of a blue-black lance.”

This profusion of gold suggests the thought of the Hebrew monarch, in whose reign that metal was of no account, so common was it. The reader will see how far bardic thought has travelled since the age of Cuculain. It is evident that we have here, not the hero, but the genius of wealth, beauty, and refinement, appearing, too, exactly at the date at which it would be antecedently probable that we should meet him, viz., in the age in which the power and civilization of Rome were at their height, and when her influence for good must have been most felt by the border nations. Though the foregoing is, strictly speaking, but a bardic vision, it is yet morally certain that it contains historic truth, viz., the fact that in this reign of Cormac mac Art wealth and refinement reached their highest point in these centuries, of which fact, the reflections pervade the whole bardic literature as it refers to Cormac.

In Ireland as, doubtless, in all countries, at remote

times, the people clad themselves only in skins,* and had no weapons, save stone hammers, and no instruments, save of sharpened flint. In the examination of the tombs at Moy Tura, no brass or iron instruments have been discovered, only of stone. Therefore, those ancient kings and warriors, who, as Fir-bolgs, were afterwards invested with the dignity of having contended in equal war with the gods of Erin, lived in the stone age, a fact which shows the depths of time into which the Irish mythological traditions run back. In the tombs on the Boyne, sacred to the Tuatha De Danān, have been found, not only instruments of gold, brass, and iron, but also chiselled and ornamented stones.

All representations of the stone age have, however, faded out of the literature, with this exception, that in the heroic age of Cuculain and the Red Branch, a necessary portion of a warrior's equipment, was the battle-stone fitted into the hollow of the shield. We see traces of this description of warfare even in the *Iliad*.

With the cessation of chariot-fighting in Ireland, *i.e.*, in the first century A.D., the employment of infantry was universal and almost exclusive. There is no mention of cavalry for the next few centuries. In the Ossianic literature which, doubtless, reflects the leading characteristics of these ages, there is, I think,

* Thus, the *Dagda*, though a god, yet belonging to a very ancient cycle, is described as wearing a very primitive pair of shoes.—See "Manners and Customs," Vol. i., p. 611. *Læg*, Cuculain's charioteer, concerning whom there are many indications that he belonged to a more ancient cycle than the Ultonian, *e.g.*, it is he who waves the wand of *Mananān* over the hero, and he precedes him going into fairy-land, wore a coat of deer-skin.

hardly an allusion to the horse. All the Fians fight on foot, and on foot follow the chase.

Tacitus in his description of the British tribes, also, leads us to suppose that the efficiency of infantry, not of cavalry, was most recognised, and held in highest honour amongst those nations who had ceased to use the war-car.

The joint histories of Conn, Art, and Cormac form a great cycle, to which I have given the name of Temairian, to distinguish it from the Ultonian, which precedes, and the Ossianic, which accompanies. There is in it a distinct falling off from the sublimity which marks the first, and from the exhilarating play of fancy, integrity of plot, and harmony of the parts which are apparent in the latter. This, though it detracts considerably from its literary merit, would seem to indicate that its substructure and essential elements are, as I have suggested, historical. The succession of the Kings of Tara, who were, probably, also Kings of Ireland, or, at all events, the most important and powerful of the Kings, are, in my opinion, historical, from Tuhall Tectmar forwards.

There is a suggestive anecdote relating to the commencement of his reign. Cormac, a brilliant boy, was present at the court of the monarch, Lewy mac-Con, when a widow came before Lewy complaining that a powerful chieftain had driven his sheep upon her land. Lewy, in a passion, declared that the flock should be given to her in reparation; but, the boy-King, interfering, declared the judgment was not just, even on the principle since called *Lex talionis*; for the sheep had not devoured the land, but its vesture, the grass; that therefore, the just verdict should be that the trespassing

sheep should be sheared and the wool handed over to the widow in reparation. This is a good example of those clever, quaint fancies that distinguish the literature of semi-barbaric times. Solomon's judgment, and the Sphynx's riddle, supply examples in Hebrew and Greek literature. The historical importance of the story, with reference to Cormac mac Art, is substantiated by the whole tenor of the bardic literature relating to this monarch, and points to what was certainly a fact, viz., that in this age the rude customs of the Brehons underwent a change, influenced, apparently, by the proximity of Rome. Cormac, himself, is also credited with having written a book of laws for the guidance of his subjects, and also a collection of bardic precepts for the guidance of his son.

In the reign of Cormac mac Art, Tara was assaulted by a Leinster army, under Enna,* son of Dunlang. He there burned to the ground a house filled with sacred virgins, an achievement which is related with pride by the bards of Leinster. Cormac afterwards devastated Leinster, and exacted the Boromean tribute with an increase. The decisive battle between Cormac and the Leinster men was fought at Crinna, in Meath.

Warring upon Munster, he was less fortunate. Fiecha the Broad-headed, son of Owen Mōr, son of Aileel Olām, assisted by the men of Leix, defeated him at Knocklong, in the county of Cork. That this was a real historical battle is extremely probable, but the history of the engagement is defaced, as some may think, and ornamented, as might others, by the intro-

* Ancestor of the Hy-Kinsella of Wexford, and descendants of Fiecha the Lame, of whom his father prophesied such great things.—See p. 270.

duction of a druid,* who, by his magic arts, aids the Munster men to defeat Cormac. This druid kindles a fire which sweeps the northern host off the field, and discharges against them a stone which changes into a serpent and pursues them afar. It is remarkable, that down to the Norman period, and after it, Irish historians could never describe battles without the introduction of the marvellous.

There are two bardic tales referring to Cormac which point to a conclusion which, upon other grounds, we would accept as probable. In one of these tales, it is related, that Cormac scoffed at the existence of the god, Angus Óg, and that Angus appeared visibly to the monarch in his chamber at Tara, in the form of a tall and beautiful young man, carrying a small harp in his hand. Again, it is said, that Cormac died in consequence of a salmon-bone sticking in his throat, a penalty inflicted by the Fir-Shee, i.e., the Tuatha De Danān, or the gods, because he would not believe† in them.

Now, at this time the power of Rome had been firmly established in Britain for two centuries. Even as early as the time of Tacitus and Agricola, the Irish were in communication with the Roman generals. An Irish sub-king, or *regulus*, fled to Agricola out of Ireland, and endeavoured to persuade him to embrace his cause and invade Ireland. After two hundred years of such proximity, and of a communication perpetually

* This druid was a southern god, Mogh Ruith. Even the battle of Clontarf, otherwise as historically described as any battle in Scott's Romances, demanded in the eyes of the bards the introduction of Ævil, the fairy Queen of Munster.

† It is far from improbable that Cormac may have been a Christian.

increasing, it is but natural to suppose that a powerful Irish King, like Cormac, could not remain uninfluenced by Rome. I think it, therefore, quite probable that those stories point to a certain decay and desuetude of the ethnic religion in the court of Cormac, owing its cause to the general enlightenment, civilization, and philosophy introduced by the Romans into the north-west of Europe. We are, indeed, destitute of any critical account of the age, derived either from Irish or from classical sources; but the whole tenor of the bardic stories, the nature of the times, and the great influence exercised by the genius of Rome, even in countries outside her direct sway, help to substantiate what I believe to be a fact, viz., that Ireland at this date was strongly affected by the proximity of Roman civilization. That Cormac was in some way affected inimically to the ethnic creed is also indicated in the story of his burial, and how the Tuatha De Danān caused the Boyne to overflow, in order to compel his sepulture with his ancestors at Rosnaree, on the south side of the river, contrary to his expressed desire to be interred elsewhere.

There is a pretty story related of Cormac, which I believe also has a certain historical significance. Once, when separated from his courtiers in the chase, he passed near a farmer's homestead in Leinster. From the house a pretty peasant maiden came out with cords and a sickle. The King, charmed by her beauty and grace, drew back into the shadow of the trees, and observed her movements. With her sickle she cut rushes near where the monarch stood. He observed that she carefully separated the coarse rushes from the fine, tying them in separate bundles.

The former she intended for the bedding of cattle, or some such purpose, and the latter to strew on the floor of her house. Presently, she came out once more, with a cup, a large pitcher, and a small beautiful jug, and approached the stream which ran by the house. First, she carelessly filled the large pitcher, and then stepping out into the stream, and looking about to see where it was clearest, carefully filled the smaller vessel with water, apparently to be used for drinking purposes. Cormac was enchanted, not only with her beauty but with the refinement and delicacy evinced in the manner in which she attended to these domestic distinctions. He visited the house afterwards, and wooed and married his peasant bride. It is mentioned, however, that her father was a prince who had ruined himself by his hospitality, and was obliged to till the soil for his support, leading the life of a plain farmer.

The story evidently points to the growth of domestic refinement in the age of which we treat. The old ideal of huge caldrons, &c., and lavish, profuse hospitality, whole oxes roasted on spits, a single enormous pot* supplying a household with food, was, apparently, at this time, yielding to something more delicate and civilized.

The same fact is pointed to in the following story, which, I believe is, in the main, historical. At the court of Cormac was a beautiful girl, named Ciarnait, daughter to the Pictish King, whom Cormac loved. The Queen, enraged, degraded the girl from her rank,

* Such is the caldron of the Dagda Mór and the caldron of Da Derga. Part viii., chap. 2.

and set her to the performance of menial tasks, so that day by day, Cormac beheld his beautiful Ciarnait turning the quern like one of the common grinding-women of the palace. To relieve her from this task, he introduced, from Pict-land, a mechanic named Lam, *anglicé*, Hand, who upon the little stream Nemnech, which flows out from Tara to the north-east towards the Boyne, erected the first water-mill used in Ireland. There corn for the royal household was ground, and Ciarnait was relieved from at least this labour.

That the water-mill, amongst other forms of civilization, was introduced into Ireland in the reign of Cormac, is antecedently probable. If no memory of its introduction survived, it would certainly have been relegated, like the invention of letters, to the dim mythological past.

The proximity of Rome, though it certainly affected the civilization of Ireland, and the minds of the Kings and leading men, did not influence, at least permanently, the imagination of the country. If the name and fame of Rome did once permeate the literature, they have since subsided from it in favour of nations better known in the times that succeeded Roman sway in the North.* It must have been in consequence of the civilization introduced into the north of Europe by the Romans that a knowledge of the water-mill was shared by the Irish, yet, in the foregoing tale, the national gratitude is referred to the Picts.

* In the Ossianic literature a character is frequently introduced who is called the King of the World. This is certainly the Emperor of Rome. But the idea of Rome does not occur. Even under Roman sway, Britain formed, to a certain extent, a single and quasi-independent land. Witness the interminable rebellions of its generals.

CHAPTER VIII.

REIGN OF CORMAC MAC ART—(*continued*).EXPULSION OF THE CLANNA DESIE FROM MEATH---
RESURGENCE OF THE CLANNA BASNA UNDER FINN.

IN the reign of Cormac the territory around Tara was occupied by a powerful military nation named the Clanna Desie, whose chiefs were the descendants of Fiecha Swee, brother of Conn of the Hundred Fights. The Clanna Desie seem to have constituted a sort of Pretorian guard holding Tara, and of course exercising an influence on the politics of the day. Cormac, when his authority became greater, conquered and expelled the Clanna Desie out of the middle of Ireland, but like all great families, these near kinsmen of the mighty Conn could not be easily extinguished. They sank in the midlands only to rise again further south in the territory now called the county of Waterford, and under the protection of the Kings of Munster, and in spite of the opposition of the Ossorians or people of Ossory, giving their name to their new possessions in the south.* Thus in a century after the great war between Conn and Owen, we find descendants of the latter, the Cianachta, settled in Ulster, and kinsmen of the former powerful in the south of Ireland, so rapid were the political changes brought about by the wars, intrigues, and swift-changing alliances and confederacies of the half-dozen great princely families of the age.

* It is from this ancient race that the title of Lord Stuart de Decies takes its origin.

It is probable that the expulsion of the Clanna Desie out of the midlands is connected with the growth of the Fianna Eireen. If we regard the latter as historical, they formed a powerful military confederacy, acting in support of the monarch, and therefore deeply concerned in all that related to the tenure of Tara. In the reign of Cormac mac Art, Finn and his warriors were at one with the monarch, which is shown by the fact that Finn was son-in-law to Cormac, and this view is supported by the general tenor of the literature. The expulsion of the Clanna Desie would, therefore, seem to point to the resurgence of the Clanna Basna branch of the Fians, and the decline of the Clanna Morna simultaneously with the conquest and expatriation of the Desie.

Those who incline to the belief that the Ossianic literature enfolds a large historic fact, will regard Cormac mac Art as ruling from Tara with the support of a purely military organization, or standing army, commanded by Finn mac Cool, formed in imitation of the Roman army of Britain, and having its central camp at the Hill of Allen, near Kildare. To one understanding the bardic genius, and its mode of working, the difficulties involved in the theory, that the Finn mac Cool saga or cycle is quite imaginary, are greater than those involved in the opposing theory of a historical nucleus. Had the history of Charlemain been lost, men might reason concerning him and his Paladins in the same way in which they now treat the Ossianic cycle of Irish literature.

If, as I have elsewhere maintained, Ireland must ever be regarded in an European relation,* and as

* See Part xiii.

influenced by the condition of surrounding countries, the reign of Cormac mac Art would naturally represent the age in which Ireland ought to have exhibited the best civilization, and a considerable political solidarity. Rome had now been in full occupation of Britain for a period of two centuries, of Gaul for three, and of Spain for four. The Roman walls evidence treaties with the Caledonians, if not with the Irish, and that treaties with the Irish princes, and political understandings with them were common, is so antecedently probable as not to require proof. We have evidence, at least in the time of Constantine, that the Irish Kings were bound to him by some undescribed feudatory ties and obligations.*

The period between the middle of the second and of the third centuries exhibit the Roman Empire at the height of its power and prosperity, and as the reign of Cormac is coincident with the close of this period, there can be little doubt that the testimony of the bards as to the power and magnificence of Cormac does, making due deductions, represents a historic fact.

But now from this time forward a great change was impending. The free border nations had superadded to the martial and heroic temper fed by bardic poetry, to chastity,† and loyalty‡ to their kings, the power

* With these facts, the notion that Cormac had a standing army of some sort, would be in complete sympathy, and if he had it would have deeply impressed the imagination of the age, and naturally give rise to the Ossianic cycle, the captains and chief warriors gradually assuming a more and more unhistorical character as the cycle ran on.

† See Tacitus' description of the Germans paralleled in our heroic literature. Of the Germans too he remarks, *Erga reges obsequium*.

‡ The loyalty of the Irish heroes to their kings is also one of the distinguishing features of our heroic literature. See p. 224 n., that speech of Aímarín to his son, "No champion leaves alive the field where his lord lies dead!"

derived from Rome of extensive combinations, and settled governments extending over wide regions. The beginning of the end was fast approaching. Now, the Goths, originally Scandinavians, and even before the age of Christ, in communication with Rome, moving southwards through Sarmatia, first meet the Romans in war on the banks of the Danube. In the ensuing ages, when the northern eagles descended on their prey, we will find the Irish play in this quarter of Europe a leading part.

Amongst other statements of the ancient Irish historiographers, with reference to Cormac, and which seem indicative of facts, I would mention these.

The expulsion of Cormac out of Ireland by the Ultonians, and his subsequent return. For this there is the authority of Tihernah.

That Cormac was a righteous judge of the *lex agraria* of the Gæl, that he compelled the Brehons to vernacularize their legal phraseology, that he himself wrote a legal treatise, and that he composed royal precepts for his son Cairbry of the Liffey. These last are still in existence, composed in very ancient Irish, but can only be attributed to Cormac in their entirety, on the supposition that he was a Christian.

None of these facts are proveable, and probably none of them positively true, but those who with me regard this king as a historical* character, must also admit the probability that there was that in his personality and in the impression which he made on the mind of the age, which warranted these and many similar statements.

* See Part xiii.

The facts relating to the religion of the ethnic Irish are few, and the intelligent reader has, in the foregoing portions of this volume probably noticed himself, in casual references, all that I can adduce under this head. The mind of those early ages being absolutely objective, and absorbed with the great deeds of men, the bardic classes were quite incapable of preserving, or of composing anything valuable upon the subject.

Hero-worship, in the sense that men were perpetually immersed in the thought of the great characters of ancient times, seems to have been the chief religion of these ages. But that there was a regular, polytheistic cult and adoration of gods is also certain. By what rites the Tuatha De Danān were worshipped, we may not now know, but in the still existing raths, mounds, and cathairs erected in their honour, we have positive and enduring testimony to the fact that they exercised a great spiritual sovereignty over the imagination and religious emotions of the age. Also, the fact, patent in the literature, that they transcended the gigantic, and all but invincible champions of the heroic age, if we require further proof, establishes their dignity and greatness.

I regard the belief in gods as evidencing a comparatively advanced stage of civilization and mental power. In the time of Cæsar, the Gauls, whose civilization is testified, amongst other ways, by their universal use of letters, for private as well as public affairs, had gods. In the ensuing century, *teste* Tacitus, the Germans were ignorant of letters and had no gods. The Irish gods, therefore, must be regarded as an additional proof of a fact, which, I think, no candid inquirer

ventures to deny, viz., that the pre-Christian Irish were far from being a barbarous people.

Fetish-worship seems to be that which precedes theism, also, in all probability accompanies it, at least during its polytheistic stages. In the Irish bardic literature, we sometimes read of hand-gods,* which seem to have been fetishes, sacred stones, or timbers. The Fe upon which there is that tantalizing half-light thrown by Cormac in his Glossary, must, I think, be referred to this class :—

“Fé, then, is a wand of aspen, and gloomy the thing, which served with the Gæl for measuring corpses and graves ; and this wand was always in the cemeteries† of the heathen, and it was a horror to every one to take it in his hand. Everything that was hateful to them they marked on it in Ogam.”‡

The survival of fetish-worship, even in an age of pure monotheism seems to be evidenced in that passage in Genesis where Rachel is represented as sitting upon and hiding her gods.

But fetish-worship must not be regarded as a quite contemptible expression of religious emotion. It involves an apprehension of deeply-involved, remote, and awful agencies penetrating material nature, and is thus, perhaps, more akin to true theism, than are the mythological, imaginative conceptions which supersede it. Of a nature kindred with fetish-worship, though

* See O'Curry's Chapters on Druidism, "Manners and Customs."

† I.e., the centres of ethnic religion.

‡ If this glossary, date 870 A.D., is admissible to prove anything, it certainly adds another proof to the vast volume of testimony as to the ethnic character of the Ogam characters. Does it appear absurd, that in this most sacred instrument, whatever it was, of the ethnic religion, that should be incised and made one with it which was derived from the Christians ?

nobler, more imaginative, and beautiful, was that tendency of our ethnic ancestors to attribute life and consciousness to certain "waves" of the sea, certain weapons of heroes, to the magic ship of Mananán, to the Stone of Destiny, the Lia Fail at Tara, &c.

All these rude primitive beliefs, seem to be an instinctive expression of that faith to which the higher religious thought of the present century is steadily inclining, that the sensible world is a manifestation of God inseparable from and one with Him.

Of the worship of the elements there are some traces. For example, Lægairey, son of Niall, swore by Sun and Wind that he would not again attack the Leinster-men exacting the Boromean tribute. He broke his vow, and the Sun and Wind slew him.

In that early composition, named the *Lorica* of Patrick, there is also a verse which seems to be an invocation of the elements.

Of special fires kindled or preserved with druidic rites and in sacred places, there are innumerable examples. On the hill of Uisnech, in Meath, such a fire was annually lit, from which all secular fires in Ireland were said to have been kindled, and a tax paid from all households to the druidic college of the locality. At Tara, such sacred fires* were kindled in the time of St. Patrick.

The least pleasing form of religious emotion in those ages sprang from a belief in the supernatural power of

* The story is well known of St. Patrick lighting his paschal fire on the hill of Slane, in view of Tara, when the druids were kindling their own. This is a further proof, if we want it, that Tara was a sacred place, and not the site of profane palaces.

the druids, their incantations, magic caldrons, wands, and such like hocus-pocus. The sacerdotalism of mediæval Christianity but substituted the priest for the druid in the minds of a people impregnated with ideas of the miraculous powers of individuals. But the subject is too disagreeable to enlarge upon.

The domestic architecture of ancient Ireland, though only of timber, was, I believe, large and imposing. The house of a king was circular, the walls of upright tree-trunks interlaced with wattles. In the centre was the great feasting-chamber, and, between it and the walls, the sleeping and other apartments. The pillars of the feasting chamber are described as being carved and ornamented with metallic decorations. That the men who built those simple and noble raths and cathairs were quite equal to the task of erecting a splendid palace, we might antecedently infer, and the literature supports the inference.*

CHAPTER IX.

BATTLE OF GABRA—EXTERMINATION OF THE FIANS.

A.D. 268. Cairbry of the Liffey, son of Cormac. He was educated on the banks of the Liffey, whence his surname. His reign is chiefly remarkable for the annihilation of that terrible band of masterless janis-

* See "Manners and Customs," the chapters on Architecture. All his inferences are supported by published quotations from the ancient literature.

saries, the Fianna Eireen. The power of this warlike guild constituted an *imperium in imperio*. They quartered themselves freely upon the inhabitants of Ireland, enacted the most stringent game laws, despised all but themselves as plebeians and cowards, and, aiming at the highest heroism and nobleness, failed, as all such military aristocracies must fail, by ignoring the common rights of humanity, and regarding their inferiors as made only to minister to themselves.

If we are to believe the accounts transmitted regarding this formidable organization, we can perceive in the mind of Goll mac Morna, Finn, or whoever they were who planned it, indications of profound sagacity, and an intimate knowledge of human nature. No man was admitted into the ranks of the Fianna Eireen whose stature was not beyond that of ordinary men, while his courage, activity, and strength, were put to the severest tests. The common aristocratic virtues these princely warriors, of course, possessed, and their bards highly commended. They were truth-speaking, brave, chivalrous to their enemies, and courteous to women. The Irish Ossian, their supposed poet, perpetually repeats like a refrain :—

“ We, the Fianna of Erin, never uttered lies,
Falsehood was never attributed to us :
By courage and the strength of our hands
We used to come out of every difficulty.”

Of Oscar, their prime Champion and darling, he sings :—

“ Oscar, who never wronged woman or bard.”

Goll mac Morna, the one-eyed Captain of the Clanna

Morna, on the eve of a battle in which a night attack was intended, is made to say:—

“From the day upon which I first took the arms of a Champion, I then vowed that I would not attack an enemy by night, or under any disadvantage. Since then, I have kept this vow, nor will I now, or at any time, break it.”*

True to himself, Goll mac Morna kept his warriors in hand during the night, though the battle raged, and did not enter it until the sun rose.

The founders of the organization knowing how all depended on fraternal feeling and mutual affection, devised means by which they should not be enticed away amongst the rest of the population by the pursuit of self-interest. Like the aristocracy of Plato's ideal Republic, and the real one of Lycurgus, they had no private homes. They lived together in camps. To encourage them to marry for love and not for lucre, the dowry of each Fian's bride went to the brotherhood; and when a Fian was slain or wounded, his eric fine went to the brotherhood, and not to his kinsfolk.

In Plato's Republic the marriage tie was slender and easily dissoluble, the children were the common children of all, and no man was allowed, though he knew it, to declare any child to be his.† Also, the women were strict members of the class, were to go

* Battle of Moy Lena. It is quoted by O'Flaherty in his History of Ireland.

† How false is the aristocratic theory of Society may be seen by the inhuman features of its perfect and ideal development and application. If any one takes the trouble to think the matter out, he will find that Plato is ideally right, from which he will conclude that the aristocratic theory is wrong, and, in the development of society, merely provisional.

out to war like the men, and to live and eat with them. Thus, Plato devised means to check every individualizing or isolating tendency.

It is strange that in this failure to come up to Plato's ideal of an aristocratic ruling class, we find one of the chief causes of the fall of the Fianna Eireen. It was the influence of women, and the isolating and disintegrating effect of separate homes which marred the unanimity of the Fians, led to the rebellion of Diarmid, and the consequent destruction of the brotherhood.

Knowing how poetry and history inflame the minds of youth to high achievements, no recruit was admitted into the ranks of the Fians who had not been educated by the bards, nor any who could not himself compose poetry. Compare with this the elaborate regulations made by Plato for the education of his youthful aristocracy. It is to be observed also that the bardic poetry of Ireland was of that sort which alone Plato permitted, namely, the celebration of heroes, patriots, and the heroic, the Dorian, not the Ionian, temper being that which was to be cultivated.

While the Fians trampled on the nations of Ireland, they suffered none else to be masters there. Their chief duty as an organization was to repel foreigners. Thus many of their camping places were by the sea, and they had war-galleys afloat. Yet the soil of Erin, not the people of Erin, was what inflamed their patriotism. Before charging they lay down and kissed the ground. This also is true universally of the aristocratic temper. It will easily love the land, while it despises the people. Lavish hospitality was one of their chief virtues. Ossian, wrangling with St. Patrick, asked whether God would suffer him to bring his dog with

him into the celestial Dûn, St. Patrick replies, scornfully, "No;" and that not a gnat could enter into heaven without being observed by him. Ossian as scornfully replies, that the hosts of the earth might enter and feast in Finn's house, and he would not regard it.

Hunting, fighting, love-making, athletic exercises, feasting, drinking, listening to bards and harpers, delighting in the beauty of their country, its hills, streams, and plains, tyrannizing good-humouredly over the people, incarnating heroism, chivalry, great in stature, unapproached in beauty, the Fians of ancient Erin were in fact the glorified ideal semblance of the princely class in mediæval Ireland thrown into the third century, and around the central figure of Finn mac Cool* by the genius of the bards. The Ossianic cycle was a magic mirror which reflected, while it idealized all that was beautiful and great in that side of Irish life which was not Christian.† The lives of the Saints and the Ossianic cycle show the obverse and reverse of Irish character in mediæval ages.

Now, in this reign of Cairbry of the Liffey, the fatal day arrived. Against these beautiful heroic tyrants the nations of Erin, over whom they had trampled so pleasantly, and with such light hearts, stirred themselves. With one accord, from their lair, as in days of revolution, the people arose, armed with savage thoughts. The tale has a sort of perennial

* We must, however, admit the existence then of a certain nucleus of names and defined characters, around whom the cycle might grow.

† I.e., the humanist side of our complex nature. Hence, sprang, doubtless, the theology of Celestius, and, certainly, the mediæval renaissance.

significance. Against these children of light, upon whom they had fawned, whom they had flattered and sustained so long, grim and vindictive the multitude arose. There is in human nature a satanic element of revolt which will suffer for ever no ruler who despises those he governs. Thus this fine mythus, if, indeed, it be a myth, of the glory and greatness of the Fianna Eireen and their final overthrow, is a type and symbol of many a more authentic revolution.*

The great psychological significance of the Irish revolt against the Fians and its interest in the intellectual history of Ireland, both what it declares and what it suggests, is the superhuman might, beauty, and prowess attributed to the Fians, and then their terrible overthrow at the hands of the people. Amongst them are found the noblest types of loveliness and bravery. If any aristocracy deserved to rule, these

* I cannot forbear to quote the words of a contemporary poet concerning that perdurable rebellious element, for ever lurking in the depths of the human soul, the knowledge of which prompted the bards, if, indeed, the whole of that great epos be but a dream, to represent the people of Ireland as rising against and exterminating their beautiful oppressors :—

“ Aloof, dissatisfied, plotting revolt,
Comrade of criminals, brother of slaves,
Crafty, despised, a drudge, ignorant,
With Sudra face and worn brow, black, but in the depths of my heart
proud as any;
Lifted, now and always, against whoever, scornful assumes to rule me,
Morose, full of guile, full of reminiscences, brooding, with many wiles,
Though it was thought that I was baffled and dispelled, and my wiles
done—but that will never be—
Defiant, I Satan, still live, still utter words, in new lands duly appearing,
and old ones also,
Permanent, here, from my side, warlike, equal with any, real as any,
Nor time nor change shall ever change me or my words.”

did, and yet the bards sternly immolate them before the wrath of the multitude upon whom they had trampled.

The revolution was headed by Cairbry of the Liffey, who had become a *roi faineant* in their hands. On the plain of Gabra,* the remnant of the giant brood, led by the heroic Oscur, son of Ossian, son of Finn, but weakened by the desertion of the Clanna Morna, the old age of Finn,† and the unmerited death of Diarmid. The Fians, indeed, conquer the vast multitude of their foes, and slay the monarch, who that day rode conspicuous on a white horse. But their victory was Pyrrhic. Night falls, and a thin shout of triumph rises from the handful of heroes who have survived out of all the Fianna, ruined now, and all but exterminated, yet terrible in the hour of their death, and masters of the field.

The battle of Gabra was fought in the year 281 A.D.

Yet such was the hold which these heroes had taken upon the minds of the people that they could not readily acquiesce in their complete extinction and annihilation. They still held that, as Fir-Shee, they led somehow a divine life in Erin, comparable to that of the Tuatha De Danān. Finn, himself, appears centuries later, under the name of Mongan. Diarmid lived invisible by the Boyne, in the enchanted palace of his foster-father, the god Angus. Coelté invaded

* The Hill of Skreen, hard by Tara on the east. It was also called the mound of Acaill, that heroine of the Cuculainian saga.—See p. 242.

† Indeed, Finn ought, in all decency, to have died long before this. However, I must confess that his entrance on the battle-field seems rather to indicate that he had now passed over to the Tuatha De Danān.

the haunted hill of Ass-a-Roe, at Ballyshannon, expelled the weird inhabitants, and dwelt there ever after. Ossian goes into Tir-na-n-ōg,* and re-appears amongst the Christians ; but, as potent warriors, of vulnerable flesh and blood, they ended their great career on the plain of Gabra.

* Land of the Ever-young.

PART XI.

Ossian and the Ossianic Heroes.

CHAPTER I.

EARLIER ALLUSIONS TO THE FIÁNNA EIREEN.

As early as the reign of Conn of the Hundred Battles, there appears a race or order of warriors who do not seem to have rendered direct allegiance to any, but to act under the authority of their own chiefs, who are not territorial kings, but assume importance as the captains of their own perfectly trained and submissive followers. Thus they assume the character of free-lances, fighting from their own hand, and siding with this or that monarch according to caprice or interest, their organization, like that of a guild, being universal and not local. Other celebrated organizations were of a local character, such as the Red Branch of Ulster, the Con-naught Fir-bolgs of the age of Meave, the Knights of the Clan Dēga, also called the Ernai, a warlike organization of Munster. This new fighting confraternity affect a national importance, and call themselves Fianna Eireen, *i.e.*, the Heroes of Ireland—Fian, meaning hero.* Whatever we may believe as to the historical character of this body, the very conception of

* Or hunter.

such an organization indicates the growing force of national sentiment in the bards, who imagined the Fianna Eireen as compared with the mental attitude of those who imagined the earlier heroes. In the age of Conn of the Hundred Fights, the dominant branch of the organization called themselves the Clanna Morna or Children of Morna. In the great war waged by Conn against the Munster tribes, headed by Mogha Neid, and, after his death, by his son, Owen the Splendid, the Fianna Eireen aid the monarch, and expel the Munster King out of Ireland into Spain. Thence he returns with an army, marches on Tara, and drives the King out of the centre of Ireland. In this emergency, Conn throws himself again on the support of the Clanna Morna, the centre of whose organization is in Connaught. They, under the leadership of Goll mac Morna, promptly march to his aid, and defeat Owen at Moy Lēna.

At some earlier date the organization had split up into two rival factions, one, adhering to the Clanna Morna and its chiefs, and the other to the Clanna Basna.* Finally, meeting in battle the Clanna Basna, overpower their rivals, and Cool, son of Tren-mōr, their chief, is elected captain of all the Fianna Eireen.

The resistance of Munster to Temairian authority, commencing in the reign of Conn, is continued in the reign of his son, Art, the opposition being this time led by Lewy mac-Con, a descendant of that Ith who preceded the Milesians in the invasion of Ireland, and was slain by the gods. He is at first overpowered and

* The strength of the Clanna Basna resided chiefly in Leinster.

flies into Britain, whence he returns with troops. Landing in the west of Ireland, the Fianna Eireen, who in the meantime had quarrelled with the monarch, are summoned from all parts of Ireland by their chiefs, and join the invaders. In a great battle at Moy Mucreema, Lewy and the Fianna Eireen overthrow the monarch, who is slain in the combat; after which Lewy seizes Tara, and rules in his stead.*

Meantime the Clanna Morna again overpower the Clanna Basna at the battle of Cnucha, now Castleknock, near Dublin, slaying Cool, father of the celebrated Finn mac Cool. The Fians of Leinster, *i.e.*, the Clanna Basna, fought this battle apparently in the interest of Owen Mōr,† but, doubtless, more with the object of establishing their own predominance than in order to subserve the interest of any king or prince. The old metrical historian sings :—

“ What they fought this stout battle for was
The Fian leadership of Fail.”

The triumphant Clanna Morna, supported by Conn, now endeavour to establish their predominance for ever, by the extermination of the House of Basna. Their trackers and murderers traverse the whole of Erin, putting to death all the male descendants of Basna.

* See p. 296.

† Antagonist of the great Conn.—See pp. 279, 280, 281.

CHAPTER II.

FINN MAC COOL.

FINN was at this time a babe in his cradle, and was saved* from the exterminating policy of the Clanna Morna by two heroines, who hurry him away to the forests on the slopes of the Slieve Bloom Mountains. There re-appears† his mother, who chants a lullaby over his cradle, of which, at least, one verse is preserved ; but, fearing that her presence would insure his destruction, departs. Here, Finn, celebrated afterwards as a hunter as much as a warrior, makes his first quarry, shooting a duck upon a pond, and returning to his protectors with the bird and her brood of nine ducklings. Pursued thither by the trackers of the Clanna Basna, he is sent to the forest of the Galtees, where he is tutored by a society of poets, hiding, probably, from the wrath of the Clanna Morna, like himself. Subsequently he is found in one of those lake-fortresses which form so conspicuous a feature in the history of the country, and the remnants of which, when discovered, are now termed crannoges.

We find him next in military service with the King of Bantry, where he signalized his prowess in various ways. Departing thence, he passed through the

* In the Greek Olympian cycle, the history of Zeus is somewhat similar. As a babe he was hurried into the Cretan mountains from the wrath of the earth-born giants.

† The historian relates, with praiseworthy minuteness, that she was at this time married to her second husband, and heavy with child.

modern county of Tipperary, slaying a wild boar on the mountain which lies between the town of Tipperary and the beautiful valley of the Galtees, through which flows the river Aherlow. Passing through the middle of Ireland, he crosses the Shannon into Connaught and reveals himself to some ancient Fians, adherents of his father, who, being outlawed, dwelt in a rude forest booth, and supported themselves by fishing and hunting.*

After this he wreaks his first vengeance upon the Clanna Morna in a style in which the peculiar grotesque indescribable flavour of the Ossianic literature strongly appears. Meeting youths of the Clanna Morna swimming in the Liffey and enjoying themselves merrily, Finn, still a boy, joins them in their sport, and drowns them.

The education which he subsequently enjoined on his warriors, he himself underwent. On the banks of the Boyne he submitted himself for seven years to the instruction of an aged bard, Finn-Eges. The perfect education which he here received, is symbolized in the myth that he caught the Salmon† of Knowledge in that pool upon the Boyne which lies below Slane Hill, and was called Linn Fecc; that his tutor always required him to serve up to him such salmon as he might catch, but, that the boy having inadvertently touched the broiling salmon with his thumb, a certain mysterious knowledge was communicated to it, of which he became

* In the epical treatment of Finn's history the appearance of the resplendent youth, his countenance beaming with hope and assured ultimate triumph, amongst those aged desponding warriors sad with many memories, would form a noble scene.

† See p. 78.

aware whenever he put his thumb to his mouth. It may be supposed that this story is too rude and uncouth for narration, but it is told in a very ancient composition. However Finn's education was accomplished, a poem ascribed to him, and believed to have been composed at this time and place, shows that the great captain of the Fians was very far from being a mere pretender to poetry. It was then, says the ancient historian, that he made the following poem, to prove his poetry. The various metres which Finn studied and excelled in, are also described in this history. The poem which I quote is written in language so ancient, that O'Donovan, who supplies the translation, remarks upon its extreme antiquity. Yet the ideas seem modern. They are, in truth, such as in no time are out of date. They would seem to indicate, in Irish civilization, a phase comparable to that which in Greece produced the lyric poets of the age of Alcæus, exhibiting the same simplicity and purity of phrase, the same tenderness and love of beauty, the same delight in the ever-new freshness of nature :—

“ May-day, delightful time ! How beautiful the colour ;
 The black-birds sing their full lay. Would that Læg* were
 here !
 The cuckoos sing in constant strains. How welcome is the
 noble
 Brilliance of the seasons ever ! on the margin of the branchy,
 woods
 The summer swallows skim the streams. The swift horses
 seek the pool.
 The heather spreads out her long hair. The weak fair bog-
 down grows.

* I do not know this character, or whether man or woman.

Sudden consternation attacks the signs ; the planets, in their
 courses running, exert an influence ;
 The sea is lulled to rest, flowers cover the earth."

The metre is anapæstic, as the first line shows :—

Cettemain | cain ree | ro sair | an cucht |

The exact method of the resurrection of the Clanna Basna I cannot explain, but am inclined to think that there was at this time no Clanna Basna to be revived, they having been exterminated by the Clanna Morna. In one of the tales, Finn himself says, that small was his consideration and power in Erin, until his valiant sons had grown up around him. We may conclude then that it was not until after middle life, that the period of Finn's greatness set in, and after Cormac mac Art began to reign in Tara. But, however he may have progressed, at all events he finally consolidated such a military power around him, that he found himself in a position to wage war with the Clanna Morna. These he conquered into submission, so that he was elected to "the Fian captainship of Fail," a position, be it remembered, perfectly distinct from that of the Ard-Rieship of Fail. Finn, though he dominated all Ireland, is never once, even in the wildest and most popular tales, described as the King of Erin. He is simply Captain of a great military organization, bound apparently by the rules of their order not to interfere with or arrogate to themselves the Royal authority. They constitute an *imperium in imperio*, with the inevitable result of gradually reducing the Kings of Tara to a very subordinate and ignoble position.

Of Finn's youth we do not know so much. In the great mass of the Ossianic literature Finn has reached the fulness of his power and fame, ruling with a familiar and easy sway his thousands of warriors, dispensing a lavish hospitality in his great palace at the Hill of Allen, the renowned Ossian ever by his side, with many sons and grandsons all devoted to him, quartering his troops over Ireland, and chasing the wild-boar and the deer without let or stay, for his game-laws embraced all Ireland, and woe to prince, peasant, or king who trespassed upon his preserves. Finn and his mighty men followed the chase on foot, deeming it a mere trifle to hunt three counties in a day. Most of the adventures of Finn and his men are connected with these hunting expeditions.

The great power of the Fenian organization is shown in the following excerpt:—

"There is," replied a Fenian queen, to one inquiring, who alleged that, when last in Erin, Finn was of no account in the land, "a cantred in every province, a townland in every cantred, and a house in every townland which belongs to Finn; and he is likewise entitled to have a hound or a wolf-dog whelp reared in every house in Ireland. He is privileged to quarter the seven standing battalions of the Fians of Eiré, together with their followers and attendants, wolf-dogs and hounds, upon the people, from the 1st of November to the 1st of May, and they are at liberty to enjoy the sports of hunting and fishing, and to use all ripe and edible fruits from the 1st of May to the 1st of November. And no one dares to give any woman in Eiré to any man whatsoever in marriage without asking whether there be among the Fians of Eiré one desiring to marry her; and, if there be, to him she is given.

"No person dares to take any salmon, fawn, or smaller game, even though he found them dead on his path on the end of every ridge, except a person belonging to the ranks of the Fianna Eireen,

in consequence of the strict subjection in which Finn retains the country. Were any person in Ireland to kill a stag, he must give an ox instead, a milch cow for a fawn, and a sheep for one of the smaller game, except that person happens to be one of the Fians of Eiré.

"These are all the benefits enjoyed by Finn from the monarch of Eiré of which I am aware, but there are others."

She also adds that there were but four who could give precise information on the subject, Goll mac Morna, Ossian, Coelté, and Lewy Lāma.

It is quite in keeping with the great genial character of Finn, into whose palace all the hosts of the earth might enter and there feast, that he should not be aware of all his privileges.

The freshness of wood and mountain, "the smell of the field which the Lord hath blest," pervade most of this literature. A single quotation will express what I mean, and show the essential difference between this literature and that which revolves around Cuculain.

Finn and his trusty attendant Dōring, after a hard day's hunting, look around for a place to rest. Finn apologises for his drowsiness by alleging that he rose early that day :—

"And that is an early rising," he added, "when you cannot see the sky between your five fingers, nor distinguish the leaves of the oak from those of the beech tree."

CHAPTER III.

HISTORICAL AND LITERARY FEATURES OF THE
OSSIANIC CYCLE.

WHAT amount, if any, of historical truth underlies the vast Ossianic cycle will probably never be determined. In popular Irish histories, written with the view of preserving as much as possible of this ancient literature, the whole has been rationalized with the view of representing the Fianna Eireen as a regular military organization, whose duty it was to defend the country from foreign attack, and to support the authority of the King of Tara. This view, which seems at first sight probable enough, receives a check when we remember that in much later mediæval ages the tendency towards national unity, though never absent and always growing, was yet far from its goal, and, without national unity, an organization having such a purpose would be impossible. To this, on the other hand, it might be replied that the proximity of Rome and the prospect of a strong settled government in the adjoining countries, must have had the effect of strengthening enormously the central authority of Tara, an authority which, subsequently, when the neighbouring countries became the scene of disorder and confusion, fell into decay.

If, on the other hand, we regard the Fianna Eireen as a military guild, concerned only for their own welfare and interests, and bound together by common ties in a country filled with jarring elements, then Finn would certainly have been the most powerful king of

his day, and Finn, and not Cormac, would be entered in the annals as Ard-Rie of Ireland. Nevertheless, in the present very inchoate condition of Irish historical science, I do not desire to dogmatize in any direction.

The source of many of the distinguishing elements of this literature is, I think, sufficiently apparent. The growing tendency towards national unity necessitated corresponding imaginative conceptions. The elder heroes were too restricted and local in their character to suit the new sentiments; Finn and his comrades have in this Ossianic literature a large national significance. The notion that Finn commanded a great standing army under Cormac mac Art is not peculiarly modern; it appears frequently in the Ossianic literature, both directly and by implication.

Again: the lordly epic and tragic style of the elder literature, its strength and sublimity, its sternness and unbending loftiness of tone, and its simplicity, made demands too great upon the Ionian type of character which Christianity and the more luxurious mediæval civilization produced. I believe, too, that the elder literature was produced more under the direct stress of aristocratic influences than the Ossianic. Under the operation of Christian ideas the popular element became more important, and had much to do with fashioning this literature.

The men for whom the Ossianic bards sang, though they could not dispense with heroes and the heroic, were not satisfied without a plentiful supply of amusing incidents, and of the exhibition of comic characters. In the *Bruidin Da Derga* there is not a single funny passage. The earnestness partakes of the awful, and the note of sublimity resounds from the first line to the

last. In the Tán-bo-Cooalney there is not a comic character, and not more than three amusing incidents. In the Ossianic cycle the humour intertwines for the most part with the serious. The underlying current of thought is indeed serious and elevated, but the note of sublimity is seldom struck and is never sustained. In the whole Ultonian cycle there is, I think, but one* comic character, as in the Iliad there is but one, and the part he plays is slender. In the Ossianic cycle. Conān, a sort of Falstaff, but of coarser clay and ruder merriment, is hardly ever absent, and, even without him, the wrangling of Ossian and St. Patrick served to keep the hearers on a broad grin.

The characters, though less sublime than those of the Ultonian cycle, are more amiable and cheerful, with springs of action more numerous and complicated. They exhibit kindly weaknesses, and approach more nearly to the common average type of human nature. Ossian's heroes delight in hunting, and the cheerful cry of the dogs, which never is heard in the Ultonian literature, resounds at all times through the Ossianic. In the former, the bardic art, where not epical, seems closely connected with that of incantations and wizardry; in the latter, it tends towards a lyrical, and even idyllic and pastoral form. Finn's poetic proclivities are of a very modern character. He delighted to sleep beside the resounding cataract of Ass Roe, to hear the eagle screaming over Eyrus, to listen to the waves dashing against the sides of ships, and to sit enchanted by the song of the black-bird of Derrycarn. Mark, too, the

* This is Bricínd Nínthenga.— See p. 232.

extremely modern tone of the poem* on the Spring-tide.

Again: the earlier heroes, though not gods, are evidently on the verge of the attainment of divine attributes. The immortal steed of Cuculain, the veil of invisibility which Læg sheds over the chariot, the vision of Cuculain standing in the Eagle's Nest, when the southern armies recoil in affright before him, the indications that the hero himself thundered and sent out lightnings, the ascent of Curoi mac Dary out of the sea by night like some oceanic genius, the demonic transformations of Cuculain, show that a century or two more of ethnic sway would have seen the Tuatha De Danān disappear before a new race of Ultonian divinities, the heroes and heroines of the Red Branch, or would have found their host increased by the admission of these as new members. The mundane character of the Fenian heroes is always apparent.

To give any extended sketch of the adventures and wars of these heroes, would be beyond the scope of this volume. A short *résumé* of the principal characters and events of the cycle must suffice. Finn mac Cool, the Captain, exhibits a character of sustained greatness, dashed in a very few tales with marks of weakness. In the story of the pursuit of Diarmid and Graney, his character suffers a distinct degradation. His standard representing the rising sun half seen above the horizon, the Grian-gall or Sun-burst, has been used by modern Irishmen as a national symbol, and might indeed well take the place of the harp for that purpose. Mere singing should not be the purpose

* See p. 332.

of any man or nation. The rising sun has not been appropriated hitherto by any people, it is the noblest sight which human eyes can witness in nature, suggesting purity, strength, and beneficence, and as the banner-picture of the Fian warriors of old must rightly displace the harp, if we would vitally connect our future with our past, or the ideas which animated the past. The harp, too, appears amongst the Fenian banners, but was appropriated by one of the minor champions.

Finn's poetic tastes, his love for his hound Bran and his grandson Oscur, his large generous nature, the familiar ease with which he moves among his men without any derogation of his authority, his love of nature, of the sound of falling waters at Assaroe, the scream of the eagle over Eyrus, the song of the black-bird of Derrycarn, his white hair and colossal size, his patriotism, generosity to beaten foes, and his unbounded hospitality, form the more distinguishing features of a really magnificent personality.

Finn seems to have been quite above any false modesty or shilly-shallying where truth was concerned. A weird personage to whom Finn related many things, once asked him who was the best warrior amongst the Fians, and who the worst.

"I myself," said Finn, "am the best," &c.

CHAPTER IV.

DIARMID AND GRANNEY.

OF course, in the immense mass of literature which surrounds the name of Finn, with the intense love of humour and fun with which it is charged, a certain Nemesis could not but overtake the princely and prosperous Finn. In the story of Diarmid and Graney, the Launcelot and Guinevere of the cycle, his character suffers a distinct degradation, and the heart of the bards who built up the tale is set hard against him.

Finn, in his old age, loved Graney, the beautiful daughter of Cormac mac Art. The Monarch prudently gave his consent to the marriage, and Finn, accompanied by his chief men, and among them Diarmid, the brown beauty of the Fianna, and, after Oscur, the most heroic and chivalrous, came up to Tara to espouse her. Diarmid and Graney loved each other, though neither had before this revealed their affection, but the chivalrous Diarmid, from loyalty to his chief, stifled all natural feeling, and with bitter thoughts went Tara-ward to the wedding.

That night, however, Graney revealed her love to Diarmid, declared her detestation of the nuptials, and laid upon Diarmid a mysterious spell under which she compelled him to fly with her while Finn and the rest slept. Several times in the conduct of the tale, Finn justifies his implacability against Diarmid, by asserting that it was while he was under the protection of Diarmid, that the latter committed that treachery against him.

Diarmid, though he loved the girl, yet out of

fidelity to his captain, resisted all natural feeling, and preserved for months his loyalty to Finn. Finn and his warriors pursued the lovers over all Ireland, the adventures and escapes of whom from the pursuers, the sympathy of most of the heroes with Diarmid and Graney, and the perpetual rage of Finn, supply the material of the most light-hearted and delightful of the Irish cyclic romances.

In one of these escapes, the chivalrous character of Diarmid is very beautifully revealed. For himself and Graney he made a sort of stockade fortress in the forest, having seven doors. Thither the Clan Navan, Finn's infallible trackers, pursued them. Finn set various divisions of his men to watch the doors, in order that the lovers might be taken no matter where their exit. In this strait the god Angus* of the Brugh comes down from the Boyne invisible, accompanying the keen, cold blast of the wind, cast his magic cloak over Graney, and removes her unseen by Finn or any of his men. Then Diarmid arose with his weapons, and coming to one door, asked who was without. "It is I," said Coelté, "with the champions of the Clanna Ronan, and we swear to thee, O Diarmid, that we will defend thee with our lives against the wrath of Finn. Therefore, let thy exit be here." But Diarmid answered that he would let no friend of his incur, for his sake, the wrath of the captain. Going to the other doors, and receiving the same answer, save where were stationed the Fenians of Ulster, fiercely loyal to their mighty captain, he at length came to the door at which was the outraged Finn. Then Diarmid put his two tall spears

See p. 108.

to the ground, sprang lightly over the stockade, and throwing behind him the broad circumference of his shield, escaped before the very eyes of his chief.

Eventually he was surrounded by Finn and his men, while he slept in a quicken tree, Graney having been previously removed by Angus as before, and Diarmid was obliged to descend in the midst of Finn and his men. Like the sound of a rushing torrent, now sprang from its sheath the spear of Oscar, and in a voice of fury he denounced his grandfather, calling on the friends of Diarmid now at length to stay the madness of their chief. Diarmid this time, too, escaped, but only at the cost of civil war amongst the Fians.

A hollow peace was, however, made between Diarmid and Finn, through the intervention of Cormac mac Art, the monarch, and Diarmid and Graney retired to the west of Ireland. But vengeance still lurked in Finn's heart. He went down into this country to hunt the wild-boar of Ben Bulbin, a druidic monster, once a man, and wronged by Diarmid's father. Diarmid, as was anticipated, came out to join the hunt, and the boar rushed at and slew him. As Diarmid lay dying, he reminded Finn that it was one of his supernatural gifts, that if he should give a drink of spring water out of his hands to anyone, even at the point of death, it would revive him. Finn a long time refuses, and excuses himself. At length he affects to bring the water, but lets it glide through his hands. Finally, the wrath of his warriors broke all bounds, and Oscar starting forward, said, "Though thou art the father of my father, I swear by my gods that if thou givest not this drink to Diarmid, with my

own hands I shall slay thee." Finn then went and returned with the water, but it was too late, Diarmid was dead.

I think the dying speech of Diarmid, revealing his affection and loyalty to his implacable chief, his proud consciousness of his own faithfulness and courage, his love for his comrades and for the whole Fian race, and the natural desire of life and shrinking from the grave, his second-sight vision of the great battle of Gabra, and the sore need that would then be felt for his assistance, forms one of the most eloquent and pathetic passages in all the later bardic literature. The painful tragedy is relieved by the coming of the god Angus, who, with his people, removes the body of Diarmid to his enchanted residence on the Boyne, where he breathes a supernatural life into the cold limbs, so that Diarmid, restored to a new existence, lived ever after with Angus in the invisible world of the Tuatha De Danān.

The sequel of the whole epic is, too, very characteristic of the Ossianic literature, in which the grotesque and comic mingle intimately with the more serious elements. After the death of Diarmid, and when Graney's first storm of grief had subsided, Finn visits her. She at first received him with a tempest of imprecations, but, like Richard of Gloucester, though with a truer intent, Finn, with his subtle tongue, at last won her affection. He returned with her then to his own camp, at the Hill of Allen. When the Fians beheld Finn approach with Graney, they shouted with laughter and shed floods of tears.

This tale, however, runs counter to all the rest in which Finn is ever just and generous, and serves

only to show how love may pervert the noblest natures.

As to Graney's changeableness, it may be said that throughout the whole tale she is evidently quite unworthy of the noble and chivalrous Diarmid.*

The grave of Graney is still visible on the west side of the Hill of Tara, in a small wood. It is a rath with two earthen circumvallations.

The foregoing tale sufficiently reveals the character of Diarmid. He was the beauty† of Ossian's Fianna, and surnamed Diarmid of the women, but also a fearless and invincible warrior. Diarmid is always *καλὸς καὶ ἀγαθός*, the perfect and stainless knight, in stature tall and comely, dark-haired and brown-complexioned, and so called Diarmid Donn, or the Brown.

CHAPTER V.

OSSIAN, WARRIOR AND BARD.

OSSIAN, son of Finn, is the historian and poet of the giant crew. Nearly all the metrical tales of the deeds and adventures of the Fians are ascribed to Ossian and

* Thus she requires Diarmid to procure for her certain berries, though they were guarded by a giant, and insists upon Diarmid inviting Finn and the Fians to his house. She was apparently not one of those who were satisfied with love in a cottage, but desired that her husband should be intimate with all his grand relations. This love of state and grandeur seems to have been the tuneless chord in her nature on which Finn played. I do not find the name of Graney, in spite of her fame, in the list of the noble women of Ireland.

† A mole on his left breast was what her *cestus* was to Aphrodite.

put into his lips. Their form is a conversation carried on in amabæan verse between Ossian, the representative of the ethnic traditions and bardic ideals, and St. Patrick, as the incarnation and type of the new faith. Ossian, as a historical character, would belong to the third century, and St. Patrick's floruit was in the fifth. But this was no difficulty to the bards. Ossian went into Fairy Land, where he lived an immortal life, re-appearing in the age of St. Patrick, a white-haired ancient, full of memories and tales. In his second avatar, the character of Ossian is most vivid and distinct; but in the age of his strength, when he flourished along with his mighty brethren, his character is not so clear. He is there but a noble and reproachless knight, and, after Finn, Goll mac Morna, Diarmid and Oscur, the most warlike and brave.

The bardic poetry, printed by the Ossianic Society, is, I think, the very worst in the literature. Nevertheless, though not easily readable, except to one deeply interested, there is an underlying magnanimous tone which relieves its literary shortcomings. In the following chapter I have endeavoured to express the essential elements of the poetry attributed to Ossian in a form which may bear perusal. This burthen of Ossian contains no idea which is not in that literature. I hope thus to give the reader some conception of the nature of this branch of the cycle, and of the century-lasting antagonism between the ethnic and the Christian ideal, an antagonism so great and so long sustained that it preserved the main features of the whole of the pre-Christian history. But for it all the Irish heroes would have suffered the fate of the heroes of the Nibelungen Lied, they would have been converted into Christian

heroes, and mingled inextricably with the early Christian saints. The very fact of the preservation of those countless ethnic traditions, and of the names and achievements of so many non-Christian heroes, must be regarded as a proof of the existence of a vigorous intellectual life upon which Christianity engrafted itself and which it converted to Christian uses, but which it did not and could not have originated.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BURTHEN OF OSSIAN.

"O SON of Calpurn of the Crosses, hateful to me is the sound of thy bells and the howling of thy lean clerics. There is no joy in your strait cells, there are no women among you, no cheerful music.

Oh for one hour with the Fians whom I knew. I swear to thee, O lean cleric, that better was one day with Finn and his heroes than a thousand years of the kingdom of heaven.

Alas, alas, sad and weary are my days confined here with the clerics in their narrow cells, without food, without wine, far from Finn and the Fians, hearing the noise of prayers unceasing, and doleful psalms, and the melancholy ringing of the bells.

PATRICK.

O wretched old man and blasphemous, how shall I prevail against thy stubbornness and stupidity? Ye the Fians worshipped empty demons of the air and the hills. We adore the Almighty God who made the heavens and the earth, and his Son, the son of Mary, who loved the poor and lowly and sacrificed himself for his brethren.

OSSIAN.

I never heard of any man having made the heavens and the earth, nor do I now believe thee, O lying Talkend. Tell me not of Mary's son. Was he like to my Oscur, who was ever good to the poor and lowly, and who would have rejoiced to die in the breach of danger protecting Finn and the Fians? Surely hadst thou seen his fight with Talc mac Trën thou wouldst not continue praising the son of Mary.

If that youth whom thou praisest were in Erin it is amongst the ranks of the Fians he would be found.

What is the good of your much praying without hospitality and generosity. In the Dûn 'of the King of Heaven, too, ye will be the same as ye are here. No eyes that behold you will brighten nor any heart be gladdened at the sound of your voices.

Life is a burthen to you, not a pleasure. Surely if the kingdom of heaven is made of men like you, a wretched nation are the servants of the King of Grace.

O Finn, my generous and noble sire, O Oscur, my peerless and beautiful son. Alas, Diarmid, my brown darling, and swift-bounding Coalté who outstripped the tempest. O Conán the foul-mouthed, how welcome now would be to me thy gibes and bitter speech.

Alas, O my comrades, whither have you departed? I traversed all Erin and found you not. I lifted up my voice and heard no reply. Over the mountains no more is heard the noise of the chase, nor the tramp of your invincible host upon the plains.

Surely he lies this man of bells and books, saying that on the cold floor of hell ye lie enchained whipped by demons. Demon nor god could conquer you. Where dwelt thy God, O lying priest, when we were in Erin? Surely had we known we would have conquered and bound him, surely we would have burned his Dûn with fire. O that my son Oscur and he were hand to hand on Knock-na-Fian. Then might I see Oscur on the earth, I would call thy God a strong man.

PATRICK.

It is not in fighting that my God delights but in causing the trees to grow, and in adorning the plains with grass and flowers.

He loves not the proud warrior nor the hunter, but the lowly and the good. The feast and the banqueting hall he abhors.

OSSIAN.

It was not in making flowers and grass my heroes took any joy, but in hewing the bones of champions in the cheerful combat of warriors, and the loud-resounding chase, in practising hospitality, and speaking the truth, O prince of a lying and niggardly race.

You have practised magic against the Fians. At the sound of your bells they grew pale.* At the howling of your clerics they became like ghosts melting into the air. When we marched against our enemies every step we took could be heard through the firmament. Now all are silent! they have melted into the air. I too linger for a while a shadow. I shall soon depart.

I took no farewell of Finn nor of any of the Fians, they perished far away from me. Out of the west out of the sea, riding on a fairy steed, came a lady seeking a champion. Brighter than gold was her hair, like lime her white body, and her voice was sweeter than the angled harp.

I set her before me on the steed. The sea divided before us and arched above us. We descended into the depths. A fawn flew past me whom two hounds pursued; a fair girl ran by with an apple of gold, a youth with drawn sword pressed behind. I knew not their import.

Two hundred years I lived in Tir-na-n-óg, in the Land of the Ever Young, the Isles of the Blest, but far away I heard the hateful clanging of thy bells, the thought of my comrades came over me like a flood, and I returned to fade away beneath thy spells, O son of Calpurn.

How stood the planets when power was given that we should grow pale before your advent. Withered trees, are ye blasted by the red wind? Your hair, the glory of manhood, is shaven away, your eyes are leaden with much study, your flesh wasted with fasting and self-torture; your countenances sad; I hear no gleeful laughter, I see no eyes bright and glad, and ever the dismal bells keep ringing and mournful psalmody sounds.

* This does not correspond with other branches of the cycle. The Fians were exterminated by Cairbry of the Liffey and the people of Ireland at the battle of Gabra.

Not such, not such was our life, O cleric, not such the pleasures of my King and of the Fians. The music that the son of Cool loved was that which filled the heart with joy, and gave light to the countenance, the song of the black-bird of Letter Lee,* and the melody of the Dord Fian,† the sound of the wind in Droum Derg, the thunders of Assaroe,‡ the cry of the hounds let loose from Glen Rah with their faces outward from the Suir, the Tonn Rury§ lashing the shore, the wash of water against the sides of ships, the cry of Bran|| at Cnoc-an-aur,¶ the murmur of streams at Slieve Mish, and, oh, the black-bird of Derrycarn,** I never heard, by my soul, sound sweeter than that. Were I only beneath his nest!

We did not weep and make mournful music. When we let our hounds loose at Locha Leint†† and the chase resounded through Slieve Crot, there was no doleful sound, nor when we mustered for battle and the pure cold wind whistled in the flying banners of the Fianna Eireen, nor yet in our gentle intercourse with women—Alas! O Diarmid—nor in the banqueting-hall with lights, feasting and drinking, while we hearkened to the chaunting of noble tales and to the sound of the tiompan and the harp.

How then hast thou conquered, O son of Calpurn!

* Tralee, Co. Kerry. Here was one of the camps of the Fians.

† A sort of favourite chant sung by the Fenian warriors. The Dord had, I believe, but few notes, and depended for its charm on the volume of sound. It is used in one Fenian poem to express the sound of the wind in the trees: "The strong Dord of the wind in the tree-tops."

‡ This was the great cataract or rapids of the Erne, near Ballyhannon.

§ One of the royal waves, believed to utter ominous sounds when the King of Ireland was in danger, also to roar with joy for his triumphs.

|| The favourite hound.—See p. 358.

¶ The Hill of Slaughter, Co. Kerry. Here the Fians won a great victory over some foreign invaders.

** There is a very pretty poem describing how as Finn and his warriors passed Derry Carn, i.e., the oak forest of the Cairn, they heard the black-bird, and paused, arrested by the delicious melody.

†† The Lakes of Lën, now Killarney. Lën was a god, and the gold-smith of Bove Derg, the genius of the Galtee Mountains. Here, by the Lake, he wrought, surrounded by rainbows and flashing stars, i.e., the usual phenomena of the goldsmith's labour idealized and made magical.—See p. 107.

PATRICK.

O thou silly old man, of whom I can get no good, if thou dost not cease praising the Fians, those pleasures innumerable that are in heaven thou shalt never enjoy.

OSSIAN.

Now, by thy hand, O Patrick, come tell me, will the King of Grace be enraged if I bring my dog into his Dún, or will he direct his servants to expel him?

PATRICK.

Thou stupid old man. He will not suffer thee to bring any quadruped into heaven of the angels and degrees. But I prithee, O eloquent Ossian, relate to me fully the battle of Cnoc-an-Aur, and this night surely thou wilt not complain of hunger," &c., &c.

CHAPTER VII.

OSCUR.

OSCUR,* son of Ossian, is the darling of the Fianna, the most beautiful, the most chivalrous, and the most brave. A strange tragic element seems to surround him. The very occurrence of his name almost provokes tears. The key to which is this, that it is never met except in connection with labour and conflict. He was slain in the battle of Gabra, where the Fianna Eirean were exterminated. Ossian wandering over the battle-field found his son holding in his right hand the broken

* This is that hero whom Ossian desired to see hand-to-hand with the King of Heaven.

sword, with the blood pouring through his mail. The last words of Oscur were—"I thank the gods, O my father, that thou art safe."

The following is an account of the death of Oscur, condensed from the ancient metrical history of the battle of Gabra, coming from the mouth of Ossian, as he is supposed to have described the scene to St. Patrick :—

"I wandered over the battle-field, many a broken shield and helmet lay scattered there, many a mailed warrior. I wandered wildly, searching for my own son.

I found my own son leaning on his left arm, his shield by his side, his hand still grasping the hilt of his broken sword, and the blood pouring through his mail.

I flung my spear on the ground and cried aloud. Oscur looked up. Oh, what a face! He held out his arms to meet me.

I sat down beside him. It was night, I forgot all else. "I thank heaven that you are safe," said Oscur. I was speechless. I could not speak.

Then came Coelté* and his tribe. They, too, sought for Oscur. He knelt down quickly beside him. He passed his arm up to the elbow in Oscur's body, searching for the bitter spear-head.

"Remember the battle of Shee Drum," said Coelté, pleasantly, "I could count armies through the holes in your body that night."

But vain were the words of Coelté. He, too, raised the cry of the dead. He cast his own pure body on the ground, and tore his yellow hair.

We raised Oscur on our spears; we bore him to a green mound. There we took off all his armour and his raiment, and washed all his white body, from head to foot full of open wounds, only his face† had got no hurt.

* This Coelté is said never to have died, but to have entered without death into the host of the Tuatha De Danan. From the haunted hill of Assaroo he drove the gods who dwelt there, and abode in it ever afterwards.

† This is very touching. The bard could not permit the beautiful face to receive a scar.

We sat then through the night watching his white body. The morning dawned frosty and grey. We saw the silken banners stirring in the dim air. We saw Oseur's banner, the slender rowan-tree, with scarlet clusters.

At last Finn approached. They went to him and spoke, but he answered not. He advanced swiftly, in silence.

He turned from us and wept. There we all together raised the cry of lamentation over Oseur. The Fianna wept over the great Oseur.

On the Hill on Gabra we buried our dead. There to each hero is his grave, proportioned to his degree; but the whole extent of the huge rath of Gabra is the grave of Oseur only—the grave of the mighty Oseur *Ua* Basna*."

In the history of this wonderful hero there is something mysterious and unearthly—I know not what. He seems a god or some weird presence coming on the earth out of remote worlds, charged with the duty of symbolizing faithfulness and love, and the divine power of suffering which never complains. There is something in his character more mysteriously fascinating than even in that of Cuculain.

In the war-ode of Fergus, one of the Fian bards, he, Fergus, sings—

"Place thy hand on thy gentle forehead
Oseur who never lied."

Elsewhere in the literature one writes—

"Oseur, who never wronged woman or bard."

* *Ua*, strictly means grandson, but is here a patronymic or family name. The following is the pedigree of Oseur :—Oseur, son of Ossian, son of Finn, son of Cool, son of Tren-mór, son of Basna, founder of the House.

CHAPTER VIII.

CÉLTÉ, SON OF RONAN, AND OTHER FENIAN HEROES.

CÉLTÉ MAC RONAN, Coelté son of Ronan, is the nephew of Finn, being his sister's son. He is one of the greater Fian heroes, slender, and renowned for his swiftness. He and Ossian alone survived of all the Fianna Eireen, but while Ossian, a withered elder, is taken possession of by the monks, and encouraged to relate the history of his people, Coelté, after the destruction of the Fians, entered the host of the Tuatha De Danān, and lived immortal and invisible in the island. He stormed the enchanted fortress of the gods of the Erne at Assaroe, and entered himself into its possession, where he dwelt for many centuries. He, too, however, is once or twice represented as visiting St. Patrick, and relating histories. In the ideas attached to Coelté and Ossian, we see a great historical truth. With the ascendancy of the new order, with its love of scholarship and learning, the monks began to feel an interest in the history of their country and in the bardic literature. This tendency finds dramatic expression in the introduction of Ossian into the monasteries. On the other hand, the bardic and ethnic traditions continued amongst the hereditary bards, and thus Coelté, in his second avatar, is found not amongst the monks, but amongst the Tuatha De Danān, the chief object of loving interest after the heroes to the non-Christian portion of the community. There is extant a strange tale in which an Ulster prince of the sixth century, named Mongan, has a dispute with his

wife as to the site of the grave of one of the Fothads,* joint Kings of Erin, in the third century. While they dispute a tall warrior bounds lightly over the rampart—it was Coelté himself—and addressing Mongan, utters a poem, the first line of which is—

“I was with thee, with Finn.”†

He then proceeds to state where the cairn of Fothad Airgthech will be found, saying, “There is a chest or cist of stone about him in the earth. There are his two rings of silver and his two bracelets, and his torque of silver on his breast, and there is a pillar-stone at his cairn, and an ogham is in the end of the pillar that is in the earth, and what is in it is—Eocha‡ Airgthech here.”

The following story concerning this hero has been preserved. The King of Ireland once lost his way in a dark forest, when suddenly a tall, slender warrior preceded him, bearing a torch. At parting, the King said, “What art thou?”

× “Thy candlestick,” answered the warrior.

Said the Monarch: “Methinks the two eyes of Coelté are in the candlestick.”

* Tiherna does not admit their claim, nor do I, following him.

† Some strange druidic notion of transmigration seems to be hinted at here. Let it be remembered that the Gaulish druids taught the transmigration of souls. I have been told by Irish scholars that there are various indications to that effect in the bardic literature. The ethnic Irish seem to have held the following belief on the subject of immortality. By druidic power certain persons might make themselves immortal, so that death would have no power over their bodies. Great heroes when slain were revived by the gods, and with them disappeared into the invisible world, but the conception of a soul or spirit existing by itself, I think, they did not entertain.

‡ *Leabar na-h-Uidhré*, Fol. 133, BB. Remark the curious change from Fothad to Eocha which was probably the more personal and less titular.

This Coelté has in his character something more weird than the others. Recall how he drave out the gods of Assaroe, and took their place, and how, three centuries after his era, he next intervenes in Mongan's palace, and relates the burial of Eocha Airgthech.

One having time and opportunity would do good work by collecting and tabulating all the characteristic references to the various Fenian heroes. Historical or not, they are real, and live while millions die.

Mr. Henry Morley, in his work on English literature, writes with warm approbation of the few passages of this Ossianic cycle which he has met. He speaks of these Fenian heroes as "gentlemen in the rough." The qualification has been, I think, caused by the roughness of the literary form in which the literature is cast, rather than by the characters of the heroes. Coelté, Ossian, Diarmid, Oseur, Dëring, Goll mac Morna, are all knightly and generous, brave, tender and affectionate. Of them we never hear anything evil. There are unknightly characters, too, the chief of whom is Conān the Bald, who are specially introduced as such with true dramatic propriety. But those others are ever *κάλοι και ἀγάθοι*.

The note of chivalry audible, though not clear-sounding and pronounced, in the Heroic ages, kept under and subdued, as it is there, by tones more deep and passionate, is heard at all times through this Ossianic literature. We now read of vows made upon the taking of arms for the first time, *i.e.*, at the ceremony of being knighted, if he can be a knight who has no horse. The vows of the Fians of Finn involved fidelity to the chief and the brotherhood, protection of the poor and weak, gallantry and tenderness to women, respect

to bards, scorn of gain.* All these and the severe tests by which Finn selected or rejected his heroes are fully described by Keatinge, under the reign of Cormac mac Art.

The old heroic literature of the Red Branch cycle, and this lighter tide of song which rolls round Finn and his warriors, were both born and generated under the stress of pre-Christian or non-Christian influences, and are precursors of the romantic literature of mediæval Europe. The heroic and knightly temper once common over the whole of the north of Europe, produced in Ireland its earliest and perhaps noblest expression. Afterwards blending with Christianity, it gave birth to the chivalrous literature of the Continent, and the real ideal knights of the fourteenth century.

I may remark of the Ossianic what I have said before of the Ultonian or Heroic cycle, that the chief personæ are but the ascending peaks of a vast region. The Ossianic characters may be counted by the score, if not hundred, with their several histories, relationships and proper antecedents. As in the Iliad behind the story and behind the chief characters, we are aware of a vast cyclic history, and perceive that the great Grecian epic is but a hand's-breadth made visible of a world to us veiled, but none the less real, a genuine offspring of imagination, and the subject of belief, so here the remnants of this bardic cycle which surrounds Finn.

Conān Mael, Conān the Bald, is a sort of

* All these qualities are apparent in the character of Cuculain. Twice he spares the life of Queen Meave, his mortal enemy, he comforts Deirdré in her affliction, and is beloved by the women of Ulster. He refuses no request made by a bard, is loyal to the death towards his chief and people, gives away freely, and eats with the outcasts of society.

rude Falstaff, full of gibes and taunts and bitter speeches. The warriors laugh and shed floods of tears at his strange antics. He is a privileged buffoon, who attacks and ridicules everyone, and whom all flatter and endeavour to please, that they may escape his vituperation. Like Falstaff, he is bald, corpulent, big-bellied, very fond of eating and drinking, a great boaster, and a pretended coward. When in a strait he can fling aside his buffoonery and affected cowardice, and fight like the best. Ossian recalls many times his pranks and fun, and delights to think how he would have bearded and insulted St. Patrick, how he would have smashed his crosses and beaten him with his own bells. He was of the hostile sept of the Clanna Morna, and is ever ready for mutiny and revolt. In one of the stories Finn, after issuing from the enchanted Lake of Lough Liath, is reduced suddenly to the condition of a weak and withered ancient. All the Fians lift up their voices in lamentation and weep, but Conān starts forward announcing that now at last he has his opportunity, and that he will revenge the Clanna Morna for all the pride and insolence of Finn and the Clanna Basna, and prepares to beat Finn. Oscr, however, soon sends him howling to the rear. He is the standing comic personage of the literature, and is perpetally introduced in order to relieve the serious and the tragic. A lady whom he roughly denounces turns upon him, and fiercely reminds him of his personal defects, to the great delight of Finn and his men, who had suffered so much from his own foul tongue. Oscr here again has to interfere to prevent Conān from beating the spirited maiden. On this occasion, indeed, Oscr strikes him to the ground.

Goll mac Morna, the one-eyed captain of the hostile sept of the Clanna Morna.

He died fighting against the regular Fians at the battle of Gabra. The following chivalrous boast of Goll mac Morna, sufficiently reveals his character :—

“ On the day in which I first took the arms of a champion, I then swore that I would not attack an enemy by night, or under any disadvantage whatsoever. From my youth up I have kept that oath, nor will I break it now.”

This is heroic, for Goll mac Morna acted up to his vow, but more noble was the bardic conception of Cuculain in the far earlier Ultonian literature :—

“ He spake not a boasting word,
Nor vaunted he at all,
Though marvellous were his deeds.”*

This account of the Fians will not be complete without relating something of the hound Bran, who is introduced into almost every tale, and forms a character as distinct as any of the heroes. Bran was a hound of wonderful fleetness, courage, and fidelity, without whom Finn never went abroad. We have even her colour accurately described, for we are informed that she had yellow legs and red ears, the rest, pure black, save that she had a white spot upon her breast, and was sprinkled white over the loins.

In the pursuit of Diarmid and Graney, while the lovers sleep on the banks of the Shannon, Finn and his trackers rapidly approach. Bran bounds forward unobserved, comes to Diarmid, and plunges her cold

* MS. Translation of the Tán-bo-Cooalney, B.I.A., p. 18.

nose into his breast. Then Diarmid awakes, and with Graney flies over the Shannon.

It is recorded that Bran was once a woman, and there is a long story accounting for her metamorphosis. The affection of Finn and of all heroes for Bran is very remarkable. In one passage he is represented as saying to Angus* Óg, "If thou insult Bran, my active, intelligent dog, I will not leave of thy house one stone standing on another." It is also related that, save for the death of Oscur and Bran, he never shed a tear. Of the rest of the Fenian hounds there are preserved long descriptions and histories, but Bran was by far the favourite.

* This was Angus the love-god. Before I understood the significance of the Tuatha De Danān, I was much puzzled at the allusion to a stone house. That house was the great Rath of New Grange, on the Boyne, the temple of the Dagda and his son Angus.

PART XII.

Irish Military Predominance.

CHAPTER I.

FOURTH CENTURY.—GENERAL ASPECT OF THE AGE.

WE now approach those centuries of Irish history in which the interest ceases to be bardic, or rather those in which the bardic literature draws its interest from certain large facts which are a portion of the history of Europe. The iron grasp in which Rome held the North of Europe from this time forward is relaxed. Decay and senility assail that once vigorous organization, and its life-blood and vitality retreat to the centre. The nations whom Rome had conquered were now wealthy, luxurious, and unwarlike; and the nations whom she had not conquered, but who had preserved their independence outside her imperial marches, having partaken of her genius, of which, perhaps, it might be said that they, to a certain extent, had become the inheritors, were now preparing to swoop upon their quarry, viz., countries in which being peaceful, the inhabitants were not able to defend their wealth, and in which, a thing far more important, the high heroic temper of the days of old had passed away, and the race of magnanimous men had become extinct. The

reader has perused the earlier part of this volume in vain, if he has not perceived that it was one of my chief objects to explain and illustrate what this heroic temper was. The bardic literature and history of Ireland may stand as typical of the genius of the nations which overran the Roman Empire, explaining the moral causes of the return of the northern tide upon soil from which three centuries earlier it had ebbed. The genius of Ireland began now to operate in a two-fold direction, the current of the national temper to flow in two divided streams. Heroism, beauty, martial success, had attracted in early times the simple and undivided homage of the bardic class. When Cuculain, the national ideal of the heroic, and Conairí Mór, of the kingly type, were exalted from the human and the mundane to the very verge of the divine and supernatural, the bards, lost in homage and awe, had no thought of their own rights. All else was swallowed up in the devouring claims of the great kings and warriors, whether contemporary or those of old time. But soon it began to be suspected that men who sang the praises of heroes and preserved their histories were not for ever to follow, rapt and exulting, the triumphal cars of the warriors. In pauses, when the clash of arms was suspended, the beauty and charm of their own voices, and all that the bardic art suggested, must have been felt, and the thought, as if unawares, to present itself in minds, all homage before, that, after all, the man of blood, and rule, and mighty thews, might not be worthy of all this lavish and exclusive devotion, and that there were other modes of human excellence than the merely heroic. It was, doubtless, in the early phases of the growth of this self-regarding

instinct that those numerous bardic stories took their origin, in which the rights and the sacredness of the singing man were insisted upon. Cuculain's respect for the bards is frequently alluded to, and Lægairey Buada, the great Ultonian hero, loses his life in the endeavour to save that of a poet. The greater kings, such as Conairy Mōr, Ollav Fohla, Concobar mac Nessa, and Cormac mac Art, all exhibit bardic characteristics. The singing men having lain prostrate before the feet of their heroes, began now to stand up and to feel that they too were men, and that intellect, learning, and genius had their rights, and, perhaps, even that by those rights they, and not the men of blood and iron, were fittest to rule. As we have seen, it is recorded that even in the age of Cuculain there was an aristocratic persecution of the bards, who had, even then, grown rebellious and insolent. This, doubtless, is the mythical reflection of a reality of later ages, but, nevertheless is, when taken in connection with other things, indicative of some early restiveness of the men of mind under the rule of the men of war.

No attitude than this could be better suited for intellectual development, as it taught the bards to reflect upon their position as an intellectual class, and upon their art as singing men, and to consider the mind in a light in which they had not before regarded it. Indeed, once the genius of the country was turned in this direction, it might have been predicted that intellectual cultivation would progress with unprecedented activity. There is nothing so quickening to all the mental faculties, to curiosity, integrity of purpose, originality, and a general awakening of the mind on every side, as an enthusiastic imaginative temper, and

this temper the bards had for centuries been maintaining in themselves and their hearers at the highest pitch. No cynicism, no ennui were there, but fresh ardour, hope, eagerness, audacity of thought, and all those positive organic impulses which imply and produce intellectual progress.

During the centuries in which Rome occupied Britain and Gaul, a gradually increasing solidarity and cohesion of Irish tribes characterize the internal history of Ireland, as reflected in the bardic historic literature, producing a condition of society more favourable to intellectual tendencies non-bardic, with a corresponding increase in the number of wealthy and leisured persons, and therefore of those to whom intellectual cultivation was an object. Add to this, that Roman culture and civilization were at their very doors.

When we find in the first century A.D., an Irish *regulus* flying to Agricola for military assistance, we can easily imagine members of this powerful, rich,* and influential bardic class, of young princes and wealthy intellectual persons, crossing the sea with the object of returning, having something better than chains and foreign domination for their native land. During these centuries, several Irishmen were distinguishing† themselves on the Continent as Christian ecclesiastics, and one became the fashionable poet of the Roman world,—Sedulius.

This intellectual movement which culminated on the religious side in Christianity, and on the secular in

* Dúvac, contemporary of St. Patrick, describes his territory by metes and bounds. It was six miles by five.

† See Part xiii, chap. 3.

that scholasticism which accompanied it formed one of the great streams into which, as I said, the genius of the race was dividing somewhere between the first and the third centuries.

The other was martial and ran out into foreign conquest, naturally, for a land of warriors and hero-worshippers would find little difficulty in subjugating a land out of which the Caractaci and Boadiceas had long since departed, and which was, doubtless, given up, like all conventional civilizations, to the mere worship of wealth, and the more enervating forms of culture.

The bards divided and went in different directions. Half went with the muses, met Christianity, and learned the Latin tongue; and half went with the men of war to conquer Britain. Or rather, more correctly speaking, the bardic genius still running in its own channel, shed forth from it a slender stream, which broadened while its own grew narrow, and deep as it became shallow.

This Part will be chiefly concerned with those martial operations of the Irish which ended in leaving Ireland the dominant military and political power in this quarter of Europe, thus paving the way and preparing the mind of the Continent for the rise of that religious and scholastic Hibernia which ensued, and which I regard as a creation of that bardic genius upon which it supervened, and which, to a certain extent it annulled.

The Romans had been now in Britain for a period of about two hundred and fifty years. In the year 50 A.D., Ostorius Scapula had defeated the hero Caractacus, and reduced by policy or arms the whole of the south of Britain to the Roman rule.

A.D. 58, Suetonius Paulinus sacked the great centre of the druidic religion in the isle of Anglesea, and (A.D. 61) crushed the revolt of the Iceni, and slew their great Queen, Boadicea.

These events coincide with what I call the Heroic period of Irish history. The prose of the Roman and the poetry of the bardic historians point to the same great social and military features in the two countries, Ireland and Britain, viz., the use of war-cars, and the sovereignty of Queens. After the age of the Red Branch in Irish history, we do not find women exercising authority, and the war-chariot is no longer heard.

Between the years 78 A.D. and 85 A.D. Agricola conquered Cambria, to the west, and then facing northwards, extended the Roman dominion far into Caledonia. The heroic resistance of the Caledones, henceforward called the Picts, and who, it is more than probable, were assisted by the Irish, checked the onward progress of the Roman arms.* The name of their leader, Galgachus, as pointed out by Dr. Reeves, is Irish. If so, he was probably a King of the northern portions of Ulster. The ancient Celtic name of Londonderry was "the Oak-grove of Galgachus," *Roborētum Galgachi*, as it is termed by Adamnan.

The stubbornness with which the free Picts held their ground for centuries in this part of the island, renders it probable that they received extraneous support from the only nation capable of giving it, the

* The great ascendancy of Ireland over the Caledonian nations is reflected in the traditional history of both peoples. See Buchanan, on the side of the Scotch, and Keatinge's reign of Heremon, on the Irish side.

nation whom they afterwards accompanied in the great wars which resulted in the expulsion of Rome from the island and the Hiberno-Pictic conquest of Britain.

In that disastrous war, in which (A.D. 208) Severus, with the loss of 50,000 men, endeavoured to extirpate freedom from the northern portions of the island, it is all but certain that the Irish and the Picts were combined.

Towards the close of the third century the Saxons began to descend upon the western shores of Britain. Then was established the office of *Comes Littoris Saxonici*, and then, too, was the *floruit* of the great Carausius, a native either of the Irish or the continental Manapia.* His reign was thus coincident with that of Cairbry of the Liffey, in Ireland.

Thenceforward Britain became the prey of the bordering nations. From the north the Picts descended upon her effete civilization; from the west the Irish fleets poured upon her shores the descendants and worshippers of those heroes with whom this volume has been so much concerned; and, from the east, the Saxons in their ships ever pressed.†

In the year 367 A.D., the country seems to have been completely prostrated, in which year the Irish and Picts occupied London. The Roman Emperor, Fanfullanides, was defeated and slain, and, also, Nectaridus, Count of the Saxon Shore.

In the following year, however, a temporary relief was given to the province by Theodosius, and, if we

* See Ptolemy's Map.

† The presence of beautiful golden-haired Saxon youths at the court of Conairy Mór is a bardic reflection of the sympathy between these nations.

are to believe the poet Claudian, a great naval battle fought and won between the Roman fleet and the combined fleets of the Irish, Picts, and Saxons. Even a poet must have had some substructure of fact to warrant such lines as these :—

“Of what avail in their defence the rigour of the everlasting heavens, or what the stars? With Saxon gore the isles of Orc were drenched, and Thulé warmed with the blood of Picts. Over the slaughtered heaps of her Irish, ice-bound Ierné wept.”

But the Irish and Picts again, 396 A.D., established their predominance, and, though checked in that year by the great Roman general, Stilicho, the repulse* must have been temporary, for, in the year 406, he was once more summoned to its aid. This time he did not land in Britain, but seems to have purchased a peace or to have effected some arrangement or alliance which relieved the province. It is remarkable that the appearance of Stilicho in Gaul, with this object then successfully achieved, is coincident within a year with the death in Gaul, in the neighbourhood of the Loire, of the great Irish conqueror, Niall Mór of the Nine Hostages.

To him succeeded Dathi, his nephew, with a continuation of the forward and outward movements of the Irish, thus illustrating and supporting by Irish historical testimony, that statement of the classical

* From the silence of Claudian ever ready to hymn in his sonorous hexameters the victories of Roman generals, and his description of the security with which Britannia now looked around upon her three-headed foe, we must rather attribute the subsequent immunity of the Province from invasion, to a pact with the confederacy, probably dearly bought, for Stilicho was then hard pressed by Alaric and the Goths.

writers, that in the year 410 A.D., the grasp of the Romans on Britain was completely relaxed, and her legions finally expelled.

Henceforward the whole of Britain appears to have been tributary to the Irish and Picts, and in this condition to have despatched to Ætius, that celebrated epistle called the groans of the Britons, complaining how "the barbarians" drove them into the sea, and the sea cast them back upon the barbarians. This was about the year 430 A.D., and met with no response.

The ascendancy which Ireland in these ages acquired in Romanized Britain seems to have been directly attributable to the revolutions in the province referred to by Nennius. As early as the time of Tacitus, the strength of the Roman army consisted in hardy warriors, drawn from the free bordering nations. That Irish soldiers served in the Imperial army is not only antecedently probable, but I think proved by ancient testimony. I think that which I have elsewhere thrown out must be accepted, viz., that the Atticotti are synonymous with the Scoti, and are, therefore, the Irish. The Atticotti appear in the Roman ranks. That they were a nation dwelling within the limits of the British Islands is certain, and also that they were beyond the sway of Rome. They could not have been the Picts, for in all writers of the period that name is generically applied to the whole of the inhabitants lying north of the Roman wall.

Ammianus Marcellinus, treating of the year 368 A.D., states that the Picts were composed of two nations, the Tecturiones and the Dicaledones. For this latter word Camden correctly, as it seems, reads Deucaledones, and places them along the western coast of Scotland,

bordering the Deucalidonian sea. I believe that from very ancient times the west of Scotland was inhabited by a branch of the Gaelic race, hence this distinction drawn by Ammianus between the Gaelic and Scandinavian divisions of the Picts, a term including all Caledonians, is quite proper.

If this be so, then the Atticotti are to be excluded from Britain, and to Ireland only can they be relegated. Ammianus goes on to relate that besides the Picts, two warlike nations, the Atticotti and Scoti, were also ranging through Britain. Unless we suppose that Ammianus here uses loosely as indicative of two nations, names under which variously the Irish were known, we will conclude that the Atticotti were a branch of the Irish race, perhaps the southern Irish, the Scoti being the northern.

Again in St. Jerome's uncomplimentary account of the Atticotti, whom he met in Gaul as a boy, one manuscript, instead of *Atticotti* gives *Scoti*,* a reading sanctioned by the great scholar Erasmus.

The importance attached to the Atticotti in these ages naturally connects them with the Irish, the most powerful and warlike race within the limits of the British isles. One writer calls them *Atticotti bellicosa hominum natio*. In spite of the separation made by Ammianus between the Atticotti and the Scoti, I yet incline to think that they were the same nation, the authority of Erasmus being almost final on this head.

After the year 396 A.D., when Stilicho saved the Province apparently by treaty,† not by force, he took

* See Camden, p. 122.

† Doubtless by sharing with them the tributes of Britain. Niall was the King of the Irish.

into the Imperial service various Atticottic cohorts, such as the *Atticotti Juniores Gallicani*, *Atticotti Seniores Honoriani*, *Atticotti Juniores Honoriani*. These regiments Honorius raised high in the Imperial service, "not without much damage to the Empire." Then as ever since, the Irish have been more or less a disturbing element in most countries; much blamed, much praised, but never ignored. When Constantine, the British pretender to the Empire, A.D. 407, invaded Spain, doubtless, too, bringing with him from the north an Irish army, the Atticottic regiments of the Pyrenees joined him, opening the passes into the Peninsula.

We must, therefore, presume that the Irish were deeply mixed up with the Imperial politics of the age in this portion of Europe, and that they sided alternately with and against the revolutionary Britons. As the Romans had to fight with them, they must have been occasionally on the side of the insurgents, and Gildas expressly relates that at one time the Irish were *confederate** with the Romans.

The fact was that the Irish of this age, solidified by the proximity of Roman civilization, and by the direction of their energies into the paths of foreign conquest, found in Britain a disturbed condition of society, which facilitated its subjugation by the Irish and their feudatories or confederates.

That these invasions were not wild plundering raids, but an organized system of conquest our bardic historians indicate, and their testimony is directly supported by Ammianus,† who states that the nations

* Gildas. See Camden, p. 103. Two Irish cohorts fought for Constantine in this war. Gibbon, Vol. iii., p. 86.

† See Camden's *Antiquities of Britain*, p. 80.

above enumerated were in league, in which confederacy that the Saxons, too, were joined, there is ample reason to believe, both from the verses of Claudian and other sources.* Ammianus, too, distinctly states that Theodosius and the Romans were not able to make head against the enemy by force, and a careful reading of his history shows that he had recourse to bribery and other arts in order to break up the confederacy.

Thus it is evident, a fact which I shall further prove in Part xiii., that international politics were a portion of the civilization of the fourth century in this part of Europe, and large military combinations, with, of course, centres of authority extending over wide districts, were within the scope of the Irish statesmanship of the day.

It was not till the year 450 A.D., that the great and permanent invasion of the Jutes, Angles, and Saxons commenced. The first step of Hengist and Horsa, according to Gildas, was to make peace with the Irish and the Picts. The Irish hegemony was then decadent.

CHAPTER II.

FALL OF THE RED BRANCH.

RETURNING now from these facts vouched by classical authority, we consider the light thrown upon them by the Irish bardic literature and history.

A.D. 281, after the battle of Gabra and the death of

* Pacatus Drepanus, without mentioning the Picts, says that Theodosius defeated the Irish and the Saxons. See Camden, p. 82.

Cairbry of the Liffey, his son Fiecha Sreabthinna succeeded to the Ard-Rieship.

Those who attach any historical meaning to the Ossianic literature will see in this battle the cessation of Roman influence in Ireland, there being then exterminated what so many have regarded as a standing army, formed in imitation of the Roman legion.

This Fiecha is chiefly important to us as the uncle of three brothers, the Collas,* who figure in his reign, and who seem to have formed alliances in Pictland. They re-appear to play a great part in the ensuing reign.

326 A.D., Muiredach Tireach, son of Fiecha.

In his reign the three Collas, supported by the monarch and by the Picts, invade the territory of the Red Branch, conquer their King Fergus Fogha in a great battle near Emain Macha, after which they burn and make desolate that classic spot the city of the great champions who surround Cuculain in the heroic ages, and expel the Red Branch eastwards beyond the Rye, into the modern County of Down, erecting between themselves and the beaten remnant of the Clanna Rury, the great mearing now known as the Danes' Cast, which, or parts of it, may still be seen running northwards from Newry. The date of this great event is chronicled at 331 A.D., and marks the absorption of Ulster into the Temairian confederacy, *i.e.*, the extension into the North of Ireland of the political and military authority of the Ard-Rie.

In the epic continuity of Irish history, its imaginative integrity and development, there is something

* Colla Uas, Colla Meann, and Colla Da Crioich.

painful in witnessing the fall of this great Red Branch nation ; how beneath some irresistible hand they are crushed down and repressed, and in a corner of Ulster take up again as a small and subject nation the broken thread of their historical life. From this race came the typical heroes, around them revolve the great heroic cycles, and from them naturally we would have expected those kings to proceed who would solidify the national existence, create that unity, and be the Ard-Ries and Chief Captains of that career of external conquest reserved for the Irish in the fourth and fifth centuries. Why the Red Branch failed, we know not nor can guess, but the fact remains that they did so fail, and has an important bearing on the general historical reliability of the bardic history of these ages. Had all been myth and epic cycle, it is to the Red Branch and their Kings that would have been ascribed the origin of the early Kings of Tara ; the Red Branch would have been represented as arriving at the hegemony of all Ireland, and the earliest historic Ard-Ries appeared as descendants of Ultonian conquerors. As a fact, neither from them nor from their great opponents, Queen Meave and Fergus mac Roy, sprang Tuhall Tectmar, nor any of the subsequent Kings of Tara.

CHAPTER III.

GROWTH OF NATIONAL SOLIDARITY.

THOSE powerful combinations of northern nations, by which, about this time, the Roman Empire was overrun, were due immediately to the influence of Rome herself. Conventional history informs us that these nations assumed the arms and the military tactics of the Romans, and thus beat them with their own weapons. But there was no peculiar excellence in the Roman sword or spear, and nothing remarkably impenetrable in the Roman shield, nor was "the bookish theorie" of military pedants of any great service in the development of a genius for the art of war. The success of the northern nations is attributable to two causes, one of which was the product of Roman influence, and brought the other, which was native, into full play. From Rome, with her settled governments, reign of law and order, centralized policy, &c., the free nations beyond the marches, instinctively and almost unconsciously began, too, to form political unions and strong central governments, embracing wide areas and ruling many peoples. Amongst them this result was attained without any appreciable loss of that heroic martial temper, that high chivalrous ardour, that loyalty to princes and that territorial feudalism which retained a spirited and warlike population, holding land, not on rent, or according to its commercial value, but by military service. In the ancient literature and laws of Ireland we perceive the secret of this vast movement, that literature and those laws being

typical and representative, to a certain extent of the whole of the north of Europe and of its social and military life. Such nations retaining the heroic temper, and having aggregated themselves into large combinations, necessarily and with ease overran regions where settled law encouraged private irresponsible wealth, and private irresponsible wealth had, as it everywhere does, degraded and impoverished the mass of the population. It is manifest also that once external military operations commenced, the solidarity to which I have alluded, and that aggregation of tribes and extension of the sway of dynastic centres, would swiftly increase owing to the direction, into a channel flowing outwards, of those energies which would otherwise be employed in political and military assaults upon internal authority.

With no other evidence than the scanty information supplied by Roman writers, we would then naturally conclude that what was taking place elsewhere in northern Europe was in operation in Ireland also, viz., that, from the first to the fourth century, the political and military cohesion of the Irish nations went forward, that somewhere a central authority was assuming a mastery in the land, and that with the commencement of the military exodus, and of foreign wars, that central authority became a real and controlling influence, a source of actual and extensive power. The bardic history of Ireland, the main current of which, during these centuries, relieved of the luminous mists which accompany its course, the dancing lights and glamour of imaginative treatment, indicates correctly the direction taken by the actual stream of events, gives a reliable account of the large general features of

the age, harmonizing completely with classical evidence, and with what, *a priori*, we should have expected.

From the reign of Tuhul Tectmar the reader must have perceived this himself. I now take up the thread of the narrative from that great event, represented as having taken place in the year 331 A.D., viz., the destruction of the Red Branch, and the extension into the north of Ireland of the authority of the Ard-Rie.

The blow by which the Red Branch fell seems to have come from the west, and has led me to suppose what is supported by other considerations, that the power of the Ard-Rieship had been at an early time, probably even before the reign of Conn, firmly fixed in the north-west of Ireland, as it certainly was in Connaught.*

With this great event the Red Branch subsides from the history of Ireland as a great Royal sept, and the final barrier which opposed the pretensions of the Ard-Rie and of Tara to a general sovereignty over the island was swept away. The family or house thus founded by the Collas on the ruins of the Red Branch was named "the Golden Hostages."† They were the chief and most honourable supporters of the Ard-Rie, to the Ard-Rieship themselves laying no claim. In their case, the conventional fetter worn by the hostages,‡ whom they, like all the other nations,

* The reign of Tuhul Tectmar seems to indicate a connection between Tara and the tribes west of the Shannon. There, too, Conn was most powerful, and there, at Rath Cruhane, Meave's capital, he was interred.—See pp. 273 and 274. Sons of Niall formed the ruling houses of the north-west.

† Or-gialla.

‡ The Ard-Rie took his hostages from the sub-kings, the latter from the nobles. "He is no King who has not hostages in his Dún."—Brehon Laws.

supplied to the King, was of gold. Hence their name.

From this time forward the King of Tara became really what for generations he had been in name, the Ard-Rie, or High King of all Ireland. Not that his will was absolute in the island, nor even the will of the confederacy which supported him. Like the Homeric Agamemnon, his was rather a supereminent dignity than an uncontrolled authority. Custom and the slowly-growing usages of centuries gave him certain rights and privileges, certain tributes, and a certain military support from his subordinate dynasts. The Book of Rights, which declares the privileges and dues of the Irish Kings to one another, to the provincial Kings, and to the Ard-Rie, being, as it is, of mediæval redaction, cannot be used as an authority for these earlier centuries. But that the Ard-Rie did in these ages exercise a real and considerable authority over his sub-Kings through the isle, is quite certain, as I shall prove hereafter.

But it is manifest that such a King occupying such an elevated position, King of Tara, the sacred centre of religious assemblages and political conventions, even though his actual authority within the isle was limited and his power to enforce his will in distant nations not great, would yet be able in foreign wars to collect and lead forth considerable armies drawn together from the territories of the smaller dynasts of the island.

With the subjugation of the Red Branch, now made weak and dependent, and the substitution in their place of the Or-gialla, closely allied and confederated with the Ard-Rie, there commences a period in which an Irish King might be expected to exercise

a powerful internal influence, which, favoured by circumstances, such as in this case the proximity of a wealthy civilized and enervated community now being denuded of those who were at the same time its tyrants and its defenders, might develop into an influence extern, weighing heavily on the border nations. Such, both internally and externally, were the Irish Ard-Ries of the ensuing ages, and, in this, the Irish bardic literature and monkish annals concur with and illustrate the large general statements of classical authorities.

CHAPTER IV.

358 A.D.—365 A.D.

358 A.D. Eocha Moymodōn, *i.e.*, the Enlarger of Plains, son of Muiredach Tireach.

No foreign expeditions are attributed to him, but we may be certain that in his external policy some foundation was laid for the remarkable events of the ensuing reigns. That he had some relations with the Saxons, who, during all this century, operated against Britain on the east, is shown by the fact that one of his wives, and the mother of his great son, Niall, was Carinna, a Saxon Princess. He certainly established, widely and strongly* over Ireland, the authority of the Ard-Rieship, thus supplying to his successors a firm supporting base in Ireland for their foreign con-

* Hence, probably, his surname—Enlarger of Plains.

quests. The great internal power of this prince is evident, not only from the course of foreign conquest now commenced, but also in the internal history of the island. His descendants form the great ruling families of Ireland, not only supplying Ard-Ries to all Ireland, but direct Kings of territories over a great portion of Meath, Ulster, and Connaught.

The reign of this King is evidenced by the all but contemporary evidence of Dúvac, the famous Leinster bard.

He is to us chiefly remarkable as the father of Niall Mór, Næ-gialla, Niall the Great, of the Nine Hostages, whose power external to Ireland was almost imperial in extent, who brought St. Patrick with many thousand* others into Ireland as a captive, and whose posterity, having made themselves territorial Kings of nearly half of Ireland, confined amongst them the Ard-Rieship, with hardly a break, till the eleventh century.

Niall was the youngest son of Eocha, and was educated in Kerry by the most celebrated bard of that age, Torna Eiges, with whom also were many other young princes. Amongst others, Corc, afterwards King of Munster.

It is significant of the age that this great warrior is not fostered by one of the conspicuous Kings, as was usual, but by the bard, Torna. The tender relations subsisting between Niall and his tutor, fill a large part of the literature which relates to him. There is one beautiful bardic poem in which Torna and his son are

* See St. Patrick's Confession

represented as praising Niall and lamenting over his death, the father occasionally pausing to give a meed of praise to some unusually happy thoughts, expressed by the young bard, thus, indeed, weakening the passion and reality of the lament, but indicating what I have before referred to, viz., the growth of a self-regarding spirit in the bards. A verse from this threne will be quoted further on.

By the Irish law of tanistry, there was always, besides the King, the King-elect, called the tanist, or successor, elected during the life-time of the King and ready on his death to step into the vacant place.

The tanist of Eocha Moymodōn was Crimthann, who was not of the royal line, but, as it were, a protector and shield of the still tender scions of the genuine tree of royalty. These non-royal tanists succeeding as Kings indeed, but who are rather of the nature of Protectors, were common in Irish history. During the reign of Crimthann, commencing A.D. 365, the Irish swept over Britain, and two years after his accession, 367 A.D., and under his command, personally or by his generals, occupied London.* In the bardic history there are glowing accounts of his foreign wars, and the plunder which he brought into Ireland, but to us valueless for historical purposes, not being of that sober philosophical character which we require for history. They, however, teach the historian this lesson, which, in the examination of Irish historical remains should never be forgotten, viz., that imaginative and romantic

* See History of Theodosius, who saved the province. Between the sea-coast and London he defeated an Irish army.—See Gibbon, Vol. ii, p. 423.

colouring are consistent with historic truth underlying the glittering surface.

Had the classical history of this age been lost, men would have attributed to imagination and national vanity the bardic accounts of Crimthann's foreign conquests. Whereas, we now know as a fact, that those bardic accounts are true, and that the warriors of Crimthann traversed the south-east of Britain, having either marched through it from the west, conquering all before them, which implies a powerful and well-appointed army, or, having sailed thither from Ireland, which presupposes a great fleet of large and sea-worthy ships.

Amongst the other follies of conventional histories I will ask the reader to dismiss from his mind the patent absurdity clung to with the most touching fidelity in the case of Ireland, that the northern nations of Europe in these ages had not transport-ships and war-ships quite equal to those of Rome. If the student will for a moment use his imagination, he will perceive the absurdity of supposing that for three hundred years Romanships should have been passing to and fro between the British Isles and the Continent; into the Baltic too, as of course they did, for purposes of commerce—even Ptolemy, the Alexandrian geographer, in the first century, had a generally correct idea of the Baltic—and that nations familiar with the sight, as Jutes and Saxons should have been,—witnessed the phenomenon day by day for three hundred years, yet were unable to imitate, or too poor or too stupid to think of importing ship-builders. The *Comites littoris Saxonici*, who fought many naval battles with them, would have been spared some trouble if the Saxons of the

fourth century were so backward in the art of navigation.

But it is with regard to Ireland that this folly flourishes in full bloom. The Irish of the fourth and fifth centuries, who overpowered the Roman legions and conquered Britain, are always represented in conventional English histories as swarming over in their skiffs or currachs, words suggestive of a half-naked man in cockle-shell canoe progressing with a paddle. In other words, it is supposed that the Irish, who, before the second Punic war, were visited perpetually by Tartesian * and Carthaginian merchants, who, in the time of Tacitus, had a larger commerce than even Romanized Britain, who, in the first century A.D., beheld every day the flower of marine science in the ships of adventurous merchants entering and leaving the harbours of Eblana, Howth and Wexford, should have been now three hundred years later with an increased commerce, with a more settled society, and greater wealth, with the close proximity of Roman civilization, so peculiarly conservative in their ideas as to send out great armies capable of contending in war with the Roman legions in little open skiffs from ports out of which the mercantile marine of Europe, such as it was, had been for four, five, or six centuries sailing with the commercial products of the island. It is not so. Those great armies of Crimthann, Niall, and his nephew, Dathi, went out of Ireland in ships similar in character to those employed elsewhere over Europe in those ages for military or commercial purposes. When Niall the Great brought St. Patrick "and many

* Part ii., chap. 3.

thousands of others" as captives out of Gaul* into Ireland, his skiffs were capacious galleys and sail-ships,† such as were common at the time.

Imagination, doubtless, is the cause of many errors of its own, but I believe that nine-tenths of the errors of history arise from its being generally written by men destitute of imagination, and therefore incapable of releasing their minds from the tyranny of traditional assertions and conventional opinions, and of sympathizing with and realizing men and times dissimilar to their own.

From the evidence of St. Patrick himself (see Confession) we know, as a fact—what, indeed, it requires no such testimony to prove—that there were regular passenger ships passing between Ireland and Gaul during the reign of Niall. Ages and epochs unillumi-

* The general opinion of scholars is that it was in Brittany that St. Patrick was taken captive.

† The fact that the Saxons, and probably the Irish, protected with leather the outsides of their galleys, allied with the conventional modern tendency of regarding all ages beyond the scope of direct lucid history as utterly barbarous and savage, has produced these errors. The Irish and Saxons fought naval battles with Rome, therefore, presumably, in ships similar in character. Light, shallow boats too they had, in which they advanced up rivers, which were, probably, those coated with leather. The assertions of Gildas cannot be regarded as against the inferences derived from broad and certain facts. His Irish conquerors he calls "wolves" and "hideous vermin," and states that it was in *one* very hot summer, with the weather of course unusually mild, that they succeeded in getting across to Britain in their currachs. Gildas, be it remembered, wrote several centuries after the events which he describes, and when the horrors of the Irish invasion had been, to a considerable extent, mythicized.

It was in a fleet of these leather-coated ships that Cæsar conducted his army into Britain, from which it is plain enough that nearly five centuries before the reign of Niall the marine science of the North of Europe was sufficiently far advanced for all the purposes of war and navigation. How much more so after nearly five hundred years.

nated by the clear light of history, men readily believe to have been quite barbarous and unacquainted with any of the common arts and appliances of civilization. But the love of exact history, that phase of the development of the mind, in which men demand a sober, critical, unimaginitive account of the literal facts of the past, comes late in the progress of any race or people. As many brave men preceded Agamemnon, so many of the most important features of civilization precede that state of the human mind in which exact history is cultivated. For example, philosophical history did not arise in Rome until the time of Fabius Pictor and Cincius Alimentus, an age in which Rome, having laid all the foundations of her greatness, was striding forwards to universal dominion, to the empire of the world. This example alone, and there are many others, should teach us that the degree of light with which we now see is no test as to the degree and quality of the civilization characterizing the period upon which we direct our attention.

Beyond the great fact that two fierce nations, one from the North—the Picts—and one from the West—the Irish, were, during these ages, dominant in Romanized Britain, the English writers, Bede and Nennius, give us little trustworthy information. Of the two the history of Nennius is the best and clearest. From him we learn that simultaneously, with the pressure of the Irish and the Picts, revolutionary and rebellious movements on the part of the Britons against their imperial masters continually went forward. He mentions three such revolutions, attended each time with the slaughter of Roman knights, in fact the tribute-collecting bureaucracy of Rome. Each time, however,

the Romans recovered their authority,* their faction in Britain being, doubtless, still powerful and not easily extirpated. Indeed we know from the testimony of St. Patrick, in his epistle to the Roman General or British Romanized Prince, Coroticus, that at some time, circa A.D. 440, the genius of Rome still lingered in parts of the island, Coroticus apparently owing his power to the support of the chief Irish princes and the Picts.

Eventually, according to Nennius, the pressure of the Irish and the North Britons became so great that it superseded altogether the Roman dominion, and weighed more heavily on the island than ever had that of Rome.

According to this writer the object aimed at by the Irish and their northern allies was the complete extirpation of the Britons and the re-colonization of the island. Both he and Bede give a most piteous account of the sufferings of the Britons at this time. Their assertions must, however, be discounted. It is in accordance with what we know of human nature that, after the pressure of a foreign enemy has been relaxed, the most lamentable traditions of the circumstances of that conquest will be preserved. It ministers to that love of the sad and tragic, and of self-pity, in which nations, as well as individuals, delight. I regard the conquest of Britain by the Irish and the Picts as having been attended, not with any organized attempt

* Doubtless, with the aid of the Irish. See that statement of Gildas that the Irish had been confederate with the Romans. In fact they fought for or against the Empire, according to the shifting tides of contemporary politics. Under Crinethann they certainly fought against the Empire, and, doubtless, on the side of the rebellious Britons.

to extirpate and expel, but with the imposition of tribute in all those territories where the invaders were able to make their power felt. The Roman Government of Britain seems to have been chiefly directed to the collection of tribute. The social and political organization of the island was principally designed to promote this object. As we know from the history of the Ard-Rieship in Erin the conquests of the Irish Kings within the borders of Ireland were chiefly aimed at the imposition of a paramount feudal authority, supported by the hostage-yielding system, and made valuable by the payment of tributes. Where conquered tribes gave hostages and paid tributes their territorial rights were generally safe enough.

We have, therefore, every reason for supposing that the Irish dominion in Britain was not aimed at that which the Saxons afterwards accomplished, namely, the extirpation of the inhabitants and the colonization of the country, but that the Irish employed the existing Roman organization, and the authority of the native princes, chief men, and the remnant of the Imperial bureaucracy to compel the payment of tribute, and that their invasions were neither designed towards the extermination of the Britons, nor were merely senseless, plundering raids, raids which would never yield such a return as the annual payment of tribute. The wisdom of not slaying, plucking, or in any way incommoding the geese that laid the golden eggs we may be sure was sufficiently understood by those Irish kings. A British prince once laid under tribute might not need to be coerced again for years, during which time his tributes would flow annually to the conqueror.

Dr. Sullivan has collected various passages from the Irish bardic literature and the early literature of the Continent, indicative of that which is *a priori* all but certain, viz., that the Irish conquest of Britain was directed towards the imposition of tributes.*

Bede and Gildas refer to a period of great prosperity which characterized the state of Britain between the last of those Irish and Pictic invasions and the landing of the Jutes. That this was not due to the relaxation of foreign pressure we know from the distinct statement made by each that it was for the overthrow of this dominant hostile confederacy that the Teutonic warriors were first introduced.

The following seems to have been the condition of Britain in those ages :—From the year 350 A.D. till 410 A.D. Britain was in a state of ceaseless convulsion and revolution, the influence of Ireland being strongly apparent throughout. As Rome grew weak, doubtless her tyranny increased, hence those rebellions and slaughters of the Roman bureaucracy related by Nennius. It was, doubtless, in aid of these rebellions that the Scoto-Pictic confederacy first appeared, and secured a political and military position in Britain. As the power of Rome in Britain grew weak, that of Ireland grew strong, and eventually the Irish Kings, leaders, as they were, of one of the most powerful, intelligent, and warlike nations of the time, took the place of Rome.

After these convulsions, and from the year 407† A.D.

* M. and C., Vol. i., pp. 37, *et seq.*

† Date of the last assertion of power by Rome, in the person of Stilicho, and this rather to protect the coast of Gaul, and leave him free to operate against Alaric.

forward, all the centres of authority in Britain, supported, as they were, by the Scoto-Pictic confederacy, though in a tributary and subservient condition, reasserted their sway. Peace then returned and prosperity; thus producing that happy condition to which Bede refers, as characterizing Britain in this age. Like the Roman legions under the Imperial system, Hiberno-Pictic armies were encamped throughout Britain during the period of British subjection. Such an army was defeated by Theodosius in his march to London, A.D. 368.

Various errors characterize the ordinary text-books of history relating to this period. The student is always informed that the Scots, who, with the Picts, overran the island, were originally an Irish tribe, who, passing over to Caledonia, amalgamated with Picts, and subsequently crossing the Roman walls devastated the island. The undercurrent of thought affecting this presentation of history is not very creditable to English writers.

It being impossible to deny that the Scoti were the Irish, these writers confine to the Scoti of Caledonia the fame attaching to the Scotic race of this age. That Ireland should have once plundered and ruled the country now called England was so intolerable, and not to be thought of, that they have transferred to the Scoti of Caledonia—an Irish colony, it is true, but who by long residence in Britain were, as they think, to a certain extent, purified and made partly Britons—the credit, such as it was, of having conquered the island.

Thus narrow and unworthy insular prejudices pervert history. That in these ages the Irish kings had

conquered and colonized a portion of the opposite Albanic shore is true, as we know from the Irish* bardic history; but in all the allusions of Roman and monastic writers, Scotia is Ireland only, and the Scoti are the inhabitants only of Ireland. The Irish settled on the Caledonian coast are not the Irish referred to by those authorities. Not one of those writers refers to the Caledonian Irish as Scoti at all. Every contemporary writer using the word Scoti employs it to represent the inhabitants of Ireland. In fact the colony was never noticed in those centuries. Bede only, accepting the Irish bardic history, states that the Dal-Riada of Caledonia were descended from the Irish, but the *Picti Scotique*, to whom he refers as conquering Britain, he describes as two fierce nations, one from the North, the Picts, and the other from the West, the Irish of Ireland. Claudian speaks of Ireland as mourning over the slaughtered heaps of her Scoti, and of the Scotie or Irish king stirring up the whole of Ireland; and refers to the fleet under whose oars "Tethys foamed." Again, St. Adamnan, describing St. Columba's exodus from Ireland into this very colony upon which English "patriotic" historians have seized to avert the disgrace (?) of recording an Irish conquest of their country, says, that he passed out of Scotia into Britain. *E Scotia in Britanniam enavigavit.*

Why British self-esteem should take fright at the thought of their country having been once conquered by the Irish, it would be difficult to procure from the Briton a rational explanation, or why Englishmen should so delight with Gildas in representing their conquerors as a savage horde. If their country had to be

* And from it only.

conquered it certainly ought to be more gratifying to know that its subjugation was effected by a race not only warlike but intelligent and progressive, such as we know the Irish of this age to have been, and far in advance of the contemporary Saxons.

By converting the Irish into North Britons, apart from the perversion of history and fact, they relegate the conquest of Britain to a race far in arrear of the Irish, and so destitute of mythical and traditional history, and so conscious of their own inferiority that they "with mistaken pride," as Gibbon acutely remarks, adopted the theory of an Irish origin.

The Irish of these and the succeeding centuries were amongst the most remarkable of the European races, and there can be no disgrace in admitting what, after all, must be admitted—that Britannia was overrun and made tributary by the Irish. Of course the real cause of all this folly is to be sought in the peculiar political relations subsisting for some time past between the two islands. In the time of Bede and Alcuin men were more rational.

With regard to this rise and fall of nations, commercial, intellectual, or military predominance and decline, a wise and sober study of European history teaches us this great lesson, that in the cyclic progress of ages these changes of relation, and reversions of mutual power and dignity, arise from no inherent superiority of one race or nation of this great Aryan or Indo-European family. Causes which the philosophical historian can, in great part trace out, produce such mutations of fortune, such ascensions and declensions. But those who exult immoderately when the former fall to the lot of their country, are as far from a

rational state as those who lament immoderately at the latter. Indeed, which is ascension and which declension, where we cannot but see that either depends upon either, and that one without the other would not be. The dark moving valley between the great rollers of the ocean, gloomy though it be and low, is the cause of that oncoming "line of stormy crests that smoke against the skies." Ireland is now, as I write, poor and weak. She was once strong and renowned. She will be strong and renowned again. But it may be, I see clearly in the case of neighbouring nations it is, that the period of fame and worldly greatness is not the age of the most signal virtue ; such periods being rather a spending and dissipation of virtues accumulated in ages of depression.

That the various branches of this Indo-European family are by nature equal, though that common nature expresses itself differently in different climates and in different nations, may or may not be true ; I believe that it is. But this I know, that the assumption by one nation of a radical and race-superiority* over another, tends rather to establish its own inferiority. It is certainly high time that this small peevishness and jealousy should cease. So keenly was the disgrace felt by Gibbon of finding his country conquered by the Irish of the fourth and fifth centuries, that he boldly asserted, without one scintilla of evidence, that in some pre-historic age the Scoti were exclusively established in Caledonia, from which position they descended and conquered "the savage and unwarlike inhabitants" of Ireland. Hence the Irish

* See *passim* Macaulay, Carlyle, Froude.

warriors of Niall were really Britons, and Britain was gloriously conquered by Britons. The ordinary English historian is satisfied with purifying a small portion of the Irish by residence on Britannia's sacred shores, after which he accepts conquest at their hands with some grimaces, thus arbitrarily assigning to the Dal-Riadic Irish a work which by every writer of the age is referred to the nations dwelling in Ireland; but the sublime Gibbon does us the honour of supposing that in some pre-historic age we issued from Albion's holy womb, therefore, are by nature pure. Thus, the history of Ireland, during the fourth and fifth centuries, redounds in some measure to the credit of Britannia, and the furtherance of that wise self-respect in which Imperialisms exult.

Every nation and race of Europe have shown that in the varying stages of their development they evince a certain aptitude for war and foreign conquest, or for intellectual achievements or commercial, or for stable political institutions, or spiritual and religious passion; or for none of these things, but unobtrusive virtues and inherent manly and womanly excellences, such as history cannot seize upon and illustrate. I will not regard any European nation or race as radically superior or inferior to another, rather, I would say, that it is the strict duty of historians to be more conscious of the excellence of other nations, than of such merits as their own may possess; and if I myself have failed to come up to this standard, my failure must be attributed to the systematic depreciation of this country and people by those writers who possess the ear of England and the world, the complete neglect of Irish history in this country, and the prevailing impression that there is

nothing worth recording in the passage of this Irish nation through time, facts which have compelled me to emphasize, perhaps unduly, all that which in our history or literature I have seen to be valuable and interesting, and to be proof and illustration of the truth that this Hiberno-Celtic race, now rapidly absorbing and assimilating all inimical elements within its scope, is by nature neither worse nor better than other European races, but equal, and in the economy of Nature and the purpose of God is destined to play its own separate and peculiar part in the *denouement* of the great drama, whose action, now and henceforward, with the advent and predominance of the democratic idea, grows deep and universal; no longer petty and local, but intermingling with that of Man. In the great world-resounding harmonies of the future, in which the performers are the sister nations of the earth, Ierné, too, will not fail, or her harp sound dissonant in the universal choir. This is as certain as time, and the sooner Irishmen and Irishwomen believe it the better for themselves and others.

It was during the reign of this Crimthann that Theodosius undertook that campaign celebrated in the verses of Claudian, against the triple confederacy of the Irish, the Picts, and the Saxons. In 367 A.D., the Irish occupied London, and, in the following year, Theodosius applied himself to the defence of the Britons, overpowering the fleet of the allies in a great naval battle fought somewhere on the north coast of Caledonia. It is with reference to this battle that Claudian represents Ierné as weeping over the slaughtered heaps of her Irish.

The ground gained in Britain, which, doubtless,

depended in great part on that rebellious spirit of the Britons against their Roman masters, and which, according to Nennius, expressed itself in three distinct revolutions, was too considerable to be so easily lost. In the ensuing reign, that of Niall, the Irish again asserted authority over Britain, and so successfully, that the great events of Niall's reign, and of his nephew, Dathi, are connected chiefly with the Continent; Britain and her rulers having been brought under a sort of feudal and tributary position as regards Ireland.

CHAPTER V.

NIALL MŌR OF THE NINE HOSTAGES.

378 A.D. Death of Crimthann and accession to the Ard-Rieship of Niall, son of Eocha Moymodōn, the greatest historical figure ever produced by this country. Doubtless his, like all merely political and military fame and power, is to be attributed to his own ancestors, to the character of the nation over whom he ruled, and to the fortuitous concurrence of circumstances which enabled him to play the great part which he did in contemporary history. But what human glory can escape if we peer too minutely into the sources whence it has been fed. Yet a man who was able to hold in subjection the proud military aristocracy over whom he was called to rule, who, though the youngest of his brothers, was elected to the Ard-Rieship of Ireland; who defied Stilicho and the Romans, nor met with any decisive reverse; who led his armies through Britain,

and twice, if, not oftener, plundered Gaul, must have possessed more than the average share of heroic and kingly attributes. How eagerly the mind desires to penetrate through the mist of ages, and see what manner of man was this whose mere outline and impression we perceive moving to and fro in the north-west of Europe, to hear the sound of his voice, observe his manner and haviour, to know what he thought and did, what he projected, what suffered, how and with what words he addressed his warriors, and how in his Dún he conversed with those of his own fireside. In vain: Niall Mōr of the Nine Hostages is but to us a name round whom sounds a dim remote murmur of great applause. King of the Irish in the age of their military power, when that long slow wave whose remote inception we have seen, whose swelling volume traced, culminated and broke with a sound reverberated as far as Rome, recalling twice the great Stilicho from Gothic wars, and deluging the border nations, whose shrieks and cries resound yet so pitiaibly through the pages of the chroniclers of the subsequent ages; we hear, as it were, the roar, and perceive the form, in some sort, through three centuries, ever swelling to such a culmination; but who can tell, who even suggest, the nature of the deep undiscovered tide out of which it arose, from and by which it was impelled, the heroes nameless or mere names, the unknown pieties and loyalties, the loving care, the suffering of mothers, the family affection, the industry and patient labour of the servile, the magnanimity of the free, the fatherhood of princes and kings, the forgotten enthusiasms of forgotten bards, the inventions and useful innovations, all the manly resolves broken, the manly

resolves accomplished, the purity and idealism of young aspiring minds, the yearning for light and right, all that was vital, true, loving, and brave—lost to sight, sunk in Time's dark hollows, never again to see the light. Behind Niall and his warriors, his bards and druids, all this; in them—all this, while even on themselves the lamp of history sheds but a struggling ray revealing only their existence and greatness, and so little else.

Such and so dimly seen the ship-borne warriors of Ireland row and sail from Irish ports in the track of the Romans' retreating steps, with behind and beyond that illuminated bard-created world, a glorified background ever present to the mind and spirit of these men, significant gestures and looks of gods and heroes, voices monitory or inspiring, the mighty and the brave of yore, whose flesh was now dust, urn-sheltered beneath many a massive cairn, many a wall-encircled rath, but whose memory sent blood quicker through the veins, inflamed many a mind, and gave strength and fire to many a heroic appeal and indignant or approving word. The body of their past was dead, but its soul was alive and strong.

How then can any man possessing the least right feeling, the least natural piety, dismiss these generations of Irishmen with the supercilious rapid phrases dear to our conventional historians, "savages," "barbarians," &c., passing thence hastily forward, as from something quite revolting to the refined modern mind?

But for these despised where would we now be, or our boasted civilization? Then, as since, mothers with many pangs brought forth and tenderly nursed and tended those who became our ancestors; these brave

men held and transmitted the common natal stock, preserving and passing forward all that had from remoter times been sent down to them. The Picts and Scots—how raw and cold is every reference to them in our text-books. Of the Picts, indeed, ancient literature, tradition, and history record little or nothing ; to us their lives are veiled. Yet for them I would imagine that the North Britons, their posterity, should entertain some loving filial regard, should, in their tombs and monumental remains seek to discern what manner of men were they, and how fed and cherished that unity and that prowess which in this age made them famous, and should endeavour to connect their lives, too, with all that is known of the spirit prevalent in North Europe in these days, and feel that beneath their breasts, tattooed and branded, beat that heroic loving heart whose throbs we feel in the antique literature of the Irish, their friends and confederates, and in the remnants of Teutonic, Scandinavian, and Icelandic sagas.

But of the Irish, the Scoti, who can now speak in words of sudden, hasty repulsion, perceiving in that, their Bible, the ancient songs and tales of the race, how therein lie, firm and deep, all the elements, all the organic impulses which go to the formation of heroic and beautiful characters ? The men who adored those ancient gods, who loved and worshipped those great Ultonian heroes and heroines, and those later of the Ossianic age, and who adorned with myths, touchingly beautiful and tender, every mountain, plain, bay, stream, lake, and promontory of their native land, were not savages, or, if they were, such savagery as theirs, in its inherent spirit, as distinguished from its archaic

simple form, who would not recall ? What a world of magnanimous thought and delicate sentiment underlies the whole narration no intelligent reader can fail to perceive. The attribution to heroines of a sweet voice, so common,—is this savage ?—the attribution to them of divining, protecting instincts, how, save in literary form, finish, and direction, does the Shakspearian literature differ from theirs ? Cuculain sparing three times the life of his fiercest foe, a woman, guarding her retreat against the pursuing Red Branch ; Oscar, who never wronged woman or bard—have we not here all the finer and more gracious elements of mediæval chivalry ? Cuculain, the prime hero of the Gael, who spake no boastful word, and esteemed himself and comrades as far inferior to his ancestors, is the moral side of our own civilization, so far in advance of this ? Lu Lam-fáda, the god-patriot, siding with the weak and poor against the strong and arrogant ; the Ossianic heroes, whose proudest boast was that they spoke the truth ; then, the heroic friendships, the scorn of death, the sympathy with personal beauty, the love of nature, the love of music and poetry, and the recognition of their magical, wonder-working power, the elevation and dignity of thought, the overflowing hilarity, the laughter riant, perpetual, like the laughter of the sea with its fathomless moving tides—forget the literary form and remember the inherent spirit, and the worst enemy of the Irish will learn to traduce no more.

Such, and so encircled with a world of splendour and sublimity of heroism and magnanimity, of tenderness and loyalty, this warlike race entered upon their conquering career. Dim as are the records of the fourth century, and few the definite facts of the Irish

invasion of Britain, the other and far more important side of our history, the history during these ages of the Irish mind is revealed in the light of that great mythic world through which I erewhile conducted the reader, the magnified glorified semblance of the spiritual realities of this age of Niall and his successors, concerning the material realities of which history so feebly and sparingly stammers forth its truths and half truths.

These truths and half truths, however, let us now consider with that attention which all evidence, no matter how slight, deserves, when it treats of an age so remarkable in Irish history, and a man the greatest of all the historic figures in the annals of this land and race.

Whether the ascription of great personal beauty to Niall be a representation of fact or not we cannot with certainty determine, but he is so well within the historical period, contemporary as he was with St. Patrick and his captor, that I rather incline to think it was. Of Niall, some ancient poet supposed, but not with adequate reason, to have been his tutor, Torna, thus sang :—

*“ When we used to go to the assembly
Along with the son of Eocha Moymodón,
As yellow as the blossom of the sovarchy was the hair
That was on the head of Niall, son of Cairenn.”*

Cairenn, *alias* Carinna, was a Saxon princess. Thus we see the bardic literature harmonizing with the verses of Claudian, in which he seems to refer to an alliance thus early between the Irish and the Saxons. The *sovarchy* was the St. John's-wort. Even the monkish Latin writers allude to him as *Niallus Magnus capitis nitidi capillis*, Niall the Great of the head of glittering tresses.

The following are the leading features and facts of the reign of Niall :—

Two successful wars in Erin in assertion either of his supremacy, or of some feudal rights appertaining to his supremacy, directed against the nations of Munster and Leinster.

Successful assertion of his supremacy over the Dal-Riadic Irish colony of Caledonia.

An alliance probably as between equal and allied powers with the Saxons, testified by the general course of contemporary history, the simultaneous assaults on Britain from the west and east, by the verses of Claudian describing the defeat of their allied navies, and by the statement of the Irish historians that the mother of Niall was a Saxon princess.

An alliance with the Picts, in which the latter play a secondary part, acknowledging the supremacy of Niall and the Irish. The position of the Picts, confederated with a King, supreme as we know Niall was over all Ireland and over the Dal-Riadic colony, must have been one of subordination. The Irish historians relate of him that he took hostages from the Picts.

This alliance, and the recognition by the Picts of over-lordship in Ireland, have, as might be expected, cast back their likeness into the pre-historic mythical ages of both countries. The Picts derived their remote ancestors from Ireland, and the Irish represent Heremōn, son of Milesius, as directing the Picts into Caledonia.

The assertion by Niall, thus powerfully supported, of certain political rights in Britain, the history of which is obscure though the fact is certain, evidenced as it is both by classical and bardic authority, and by

the testimony of the Irish monasteries, the last of which I regard as good evidence for the general course of our history during a period embracing at least two centuries prior to St. Patrick. The grounds of this assertion I have set forth in Part xiii.

388 A.D. Invasion and plunder of Brittany, on which occasion Niall carried away captive into Ireland St. Patrick, then a boy of sixteen, and his two sisters, Lupida and Darerca, with "thousands" of others.

396 A.D. The Irish supremacy, resisted and interrupted by Stilicho, and endeavoured to be maintained by Niall backed by the whole of the Irish nation. In such wars we would naturally expect that all the Irish Kings would fall behind Niall and support him loyally in the maintenance of claims in which they were all interested. That such was the fact we know from Claudian, who states that he stirred up the whole of Ireland against the approach of Stilicho and the Roman legions.

Circa 400 A.D. Re-assertion of supremacy over Britain.

405 A.D. Invasion of Gaul by Niall, in which expedition he was slain either in an intestine war amongst the forces whom he led, or by assassination. The bardic version of his death is this: Eocha Kinsalah, whom Niall had dethroned and expelled from Leinster, was at this time serving as a plain warrior in the Pictish army. Finding his opportunity, he with an arrow from the opposite bank of the Loire, slew the monarch, and mounting his horse, escaped to the sea-shore, whence he took ship for Ireland.

The death of Niall is thus recounted by the Four Masters :—

"405 A.D. After Niall of the Nine Hostages, son of Eocha Moymodón, had been twenty-seven years in the sovereignty of Ireland, he was slain by Eocha, son of Enna Kinsala, at Muir-n-Icht, i.e., the sea between France and England."

The Irish name for this channel, Muir-n-Icht, or the Ictian Sea, seems to be connected with the Latin *Portus Iccius*, the modern Boulogne.

In the Roman chronicles it is recorded that a British pretender to the Empire was slain here in the year 406 A.D. The general coincidence of place, and the approximate coincidence of time, provoke the suspicion that this Marcus was but Niall under a Roman name. The hegemony of Ireland over Britain prevailed during these years, which is evidenced by the fact that Niall leaving Britain behind him now as in 388 A.D., assailed Gaul, and also by the fact that in 406 A.D., Stilicho a second time was summoned to this part of Europe to protect Britain against the Hiberno-Pictic confederacy. If Marcus were not Niall, he must have been either put forward by Niall as a Pretender to the Empire, or have come forward relying chiefly on Niall's support. The fact averred by Gildas that the Romans and the Irish had been confederates, coupled with the absolute impossibility of Marcus taking such a step without coming to terms with Niall, and the improbability that he would have done so without stronger assistance than that of the Roman legionaries in Britain, supports this view. The hegemony of Ireland in the British Isles must be taken as a fact in any explanation of the events of these years.

From this time forward the Romans seem to have given up even the pretence of regarding Britain as an Imperial Province. The Irish simply occupied the

ground left dry by the retiring tide of Rome. In the year 410 A.D., Stilicho was defeated and slain by Alaric and the Goths.

This Niall is the greatest historic figure at any time appearing in the annals of Ireland, meagre as is our information concerning him. Doubtless the nature of the times in which he appeared contributed much to this result, but we may be sure that his uninterrupted reign of twenty-seven years of prosperity and military success was not reached without the exhibition on his part of great personal superiority. He was the youngest of the sons of his father, and therefore his election, by itself alone, would prove the possession on his part of conspicuous royal qualities. In one of that class of homely stories which also illustrate the characters of the Saxon Kings of England, we perceive an estimate formed by his contemporaries as to his physical strength and personal daring. When a boy, the forge of his father's chief smith being in flames, he and his brothers rushed through the smoke and fire to rescue the contents of the forge. The other boys brought out respectively the bellows, the forge instruments, and a chariot, but Niall, the youngest, raised up and bore away the great ponderous anvil.

One of these brothers, Fiechra, as we shall presently see, filled a great part in contemporary history. When Niall was elected Ard-Rie of all Ireland, or rather, having been Tanist, had succeeded to that dignity on the death of Crimthann, a war broke forth between the Ard-Rie and Corc, King of Munster, who had also been his school-fellow. Of this war some ancient bard thus sang :—

“ A meeting of battle between Core and Niall,
 Whether at hand or far distant,
 Fierce the tramp on every shore
 Of Niall, the son of Eocha Moymodón.”

As I have before stated, I regard the West of Ireland as the hereditary dominions of the line of Tuhall Tectmar, whence the race worked first eastward into Meath, seizing Tara, spreading also north-eastward through Ulster, and there successively conquering Donegal and Tyrone, in which counties we shall presently find sons of this Niall established as kings, and finally expelling the Red Branch out of the midst of the province, driving them eastward into Down.

In the reign of Niall, his brother, Fiechra, was king of the nations west of the Shannon, with feudal royalties and claims to tribute either in his own right or, more probably, in that of the Ard-Rie, his brother, as we find him returning not to Connaught but to Tara after a southern war, thus described by some ancient historian :—

“ Then the men of Munster gave him battle in Cœnrighe (Co. Limerick), and Maidhi Mescorach wounded Fiechra mortally in the battle. Nevertheless, the men of Munster and the Ernai were defeated by dint of fighting, and suffered a great slaughter. Then Fiechra carried away fifty hostages out of Munster, together with his tribute in full, and set forth on his march to Temair. Now when he had reached Forraidh, in Uibh Mic-cuais, in West Meath, Fiechra died there of his wound, and his grave was made, and his mound was raised, and his *cluiché cainte* (funeral rites, including games and dirges), were ignited, and his ogham name was written, and the hostages which he had brought from the South were buried alive round Fiechra's grave.”—[Book of Ballymote, Fol. 145, BB.]

I give the foregoing quotation for what it is worth. It may be a literal statement of fact, with that one

red glare indicative of the terrible fierceness of the age, and showing how wrath and sorrow, perhaps, too, superstition, steeled men's hearts to any suffering and cries for mercy.

If we regard it as true it recalls to our minds the kindred facts that in this very age the Saxons deliberately slaughtered a tenth of all their captives in honour of the war-gods ; and those pictures, drawn by the genial and beautiful Homer, of his hero Achilles slaughtering even his suppliants who clasped his knees, and in cold blood, at the funeral pyre of his friend, cutting the throats of his captives, an offering to the *Manes* of Patroclus.

At the same time the foregoing passage presents a suspiciously sober and historical appearance, the bardic literature being then always most doubtful when it seems most realistic. It was this that first excited my suspicion with regard to the Atticottic revolution. I have, too, remarked that in much of the literature which invests the mounds of the cemeteries, where smaller graves surround some great tumulus, the former come to represent or to suggest hostages, and the latter the king whose those hostages were. In the Christian ages, though we may be certain that actual ferocity decreased from what it had been, yet a sort of imaginative and intellectual love of the terrible and the cruel widely prevailed, which may be clearly seen in the lives of the saints. I think it more probable that it was in this age that the idea arose expressed in the foregoing passage. In the genuine and indubitable bardic literature, issuing out of the pre-Christian ages, there is no parallel to this. Though there is much fierceness there is no cruelty.

Politically, this passage indicates an important historical fact, viz. : that those frequent wars of early Ireland were, as a rule, undertaken for the enforcement of authority and the insistence of feudal rights and tributes, and were not mere lawless raids. When these rights had been successfully and several times enforced they became recognised and customary.

Before Niall engaged in foreign wars he was also obliged to chastise the Leinster men and exact upon them the Boromean tribute. It was their expelled king, Eocha, son of Enna Kinsalah, who is represented as having finally assassinated the monarch in Gaul.

Of Niall's foreign wars the bardic literature so overlays fact with romantic embellishments that we can accept little with reliance, save the great fact testified to by Bede, Nennius, St. Patrick, and Roman writers, that under him, or during his floruit, Ireland was the dominant power in these islands, and that its power was seriously felt even in Gaul. As I have said, scholars are generally agreed that it was in Brittany that St. Patrick was taken captive, which, having been in the reign of Niall, must have been undertaken by himself in person or by his generals. That this invasion, plundering expedition, or what not, was carried on upon a large scale, St. Patrick's reference to the thousands of captives brought along with him into Ireland plainly shows.

Unfortunately, the classical history of this age, as it affects Northern Europe, is most meagre and confused.

All the Irish authorities concur in stating that Niall was slain in Gaul, and by an expelled Irish

king, seemingly with the support of the Picts. It is strange that the date of Niall's death, A.D. 405, coincides, within a year, with the second appearance of Stilicho in this part of Europe. That Niall was slain in an intestine war of the Scoto-Pictic confederacy on the occasion of this expedition, and that this war was in some way due to Stilicho, is probable. The bardic story states that Eocha, son of Enna Kinsalah, slew him with an arrow, discharged across the river Loire, in Gaul, and that he was there interred. It is remarkable that of his successor, Dathi, also slain on the Continent, the remains, probably the cinerary urn with his ashes, were brought back to Ireland by his warriors, and interred with lamentations and funeral games at Rathcrōgan, in the West.

I know no portion of our history which would better adapt itself to epical treatment than this reign of Niall, the very absence of minute historical evidence being, in itself, to a certain extent, an advantage, by enabling an author to shape the characters and events so as to elucidate in the most dramatic manner the great features of the age. The historian would have as an absolute basis of definite fact the great Niall himself and his warlike sons, well-known, definite characters in Irish history, then this headlong, progressive Irish race, heroic, high-tempered, brave, mettlesome, with all its inspiring memories, its daring and proud consciousness of adherence to its own standard, of what was right, chivalrous, and manly, defective and crude as that standard, no doubt, was. He would also perceive throughout the island, appearing, too, in Niall's armies, and in the conversations of the bards and the better educated, the dawning light of Chris-

tianity and the slow growth of new ideals of life and conduct ; and he could so shape the epic as to bring into bold contrast the two great conflicting types—the saintly and the heroic.

On the other hand, there would be the failing power of Rome relaxing and growing faint, the luxurious and effete civilization of the Britons, the wealth of their wealthy, and the misery of their poor ; the general incapacity for resistance to the terrible power now bursting upon them.

The Saxons, too, would fill a side of the epic—brave and manful, fair-haired, stubborn, but all too gross ; without literature* or chivalrous ideals, without the fierce, headlong ardour of the Irish or their refinement, but having, withal, substantial qualities, which would wear well and blossom nobly, if not for many centuries. The Irish and the Saxons were at this time good friends, as, doubtless, they will be again, when the political quarrel is adjusted. At the Court of Conairy Mōr, on the night on which he was slain, we have seen three beautiful Saxons, youths in fosterage, and the mother of Niall Mōr was a Saxon Princess, Carinda by name.

The Picts, secondary to the Irish in a political and military point of view, and of a more archaic and

* Professor Morley (see History of English Literature) admits this. Modern English writers, such as Mr. Carlyle, perceiving the value of a mythical and heroic world lying behind the history of a race, unfairly treat the mythology of the Edda, which was not only of far later development, but was also Norse, not Teutonic, as if it were that in which the primitive Saxons believed. Surely, the English race has done enough to prove its greatness without either arrogating to themselves that to which they have no claim or unduly depreciating or ignoring the history and literature of their neighbours.

runder civilization, would, doubtless, require more care and thought. The hosting of Niall's warriors throughout Ireland, under their many kings ; the animated scene in the harbours covered with transports and ships of war ; the devastation of Brittany, and the capture there of a certain patient, thoughtful boy of sixteen, soon a slave to herd cattle on the hill-sides of Dal-Aradia, enduring meekly his hard fare, having his lonely nights * to himself for prayer, would occupy many an inspiring canto ; the whole ending with the assassination, or the death in battle of the renowned Niall.

The man who can do this, and do it well ; who can make us see and feel the great Irish King, and the other chief personæ of the epoch, and, as we read, breathe the spirit of the age, impregnated with its many strange odours, will, in my opinion, have written a truer history than any conventional historian can write, and one which will take simultaneous possession of the heart, the imagination, and the intellect. At the same time such a work should not be lightly attempted, nor without the most adequate and thorough accumulation of all that antiquarian research has brought to light.

* St. Patrick himself states that even in frosty nights he used to remain in prayer when a boy, and contrasts his present coldness with former ardour.

CHAPTER VI.

DATHI, SON OF FIECHRA, NIALL'S NEPHEW.

As the tide of Rome ebbed from the British Isles, and lingered awhile in Gaul, it is but natural to suppose that the Irish, who had extended their power over all Britain, should have followed its retiring track. The old alliance between the Saxons and the Irish apparently still held good, and the coasts of Gaul suffered equally from both. The antecedent probability that the Irish, having laid Britain under tribute, now turned their attention to the Romanized portion of the Continent, a quarry upon which so many northern eagles were flocking, is strengthened and converted into a certainty by the Irish historical monuments, as they refer to the successor of Niall.

405 A.D. Dathi, son of that Fiechra whose death was so terribly avenged on the hostages of Munster. The great outward movements of the Irish race, the most prominent feature of these, the fourth and fifth centuries, were continued by him. His first step was the subjugation of the Picts, which adds force to the notion that they were concerned in the events which led to the death of his uncle. Britain seems to have been at this time quite tributary to Ireland, and thus we find the predatory expeditions of Dathi chiefly undertaken on the Continent. In our histories it is stated that he advanced to the Alps, with the object of invading Italy, but that in passing these mountains he was slain by a flash of lightning.

Niebuhr compares this great march of Dathi with

certain fabulous expeditions recorded of Charlemain by mediæval historians.

That Dathi was mixed up in the obscure wars then being waged in the north of Europe is, probably, all that can be asserted with confidence. At the same time, the peculiar manner of his death is quite unsuitable to the genius of the bardic imaginative literature, which, through all its vast extent, records no other event of the kind concerning any of its innumerable kings and heroes, and he himself is well within the domain of positive history, though, of course, that does not substantiate the truth of specific statements concerning him.

Niall, as we know, did twice invade Gaul, and that his nephew, Dathi, may have marched a considerable distance from the sea-coast, or even in the pay of the Roman Emperor, like other northern warriors, reached as far as Italy, is quite possible.

Amalgad, his son, brought back the ashes of his sire, fighting ten battles on the way : at Lundunn, probably London, Corper, Cingé or Címé, Colon, Failé, Miscail, Coirté, Moilé, Grenius, and Fermir.

These places are not identified, nor the particulars of the battles described. They stand there in the oldest Irish manuscript in existence, without comment or explanation. Acquainted, as I am, with the genius of the bardic literature and its tendency to epicize events, scattered over a considerable space of time, I yet think it probable that these are actual historical battles fought by Amalgad. Were they, as Dr. Sullivan suggests, a group of all the greatest battles fought by the Irish during the period of their military predominance, they would certainly have been attributed to

Niall, the greatest of the Irish monarchs of the age, and not to this obscure Amalgad.

It is related of Dathi, how after his election to the Ard-Rieship he was saluted by his Druids as High King of Erin and Alba. "How can that be," replied the King; "for the High Kingship of Erin only is mine?"

"The Kingship of Alba, too, thou shalt obtain," they answered; "and thou shalt follow the conquering footsteps of Crimthann, and of thy great uncle, Niall Mōr, son of Eocha Moymodōn."

After this Dathi ordered his fleet to assemble at Drogheda. He himself, however, went on to Carlingford Bay, where his fleet subsequently met him. Thence he sailed to Caledonia, when, after one battle, the Picts submitted to his sovereignty and gave hostages.

If Dathi did reach the Alps it may have been as captain of an Atticottic army in the pay of the Roman* Emperor, like other hired auxiliaries drawn from beyond the Imperial marches. In the *Notitia Imperii* the Atticotti are mentioned as having been stationed at various points throughout the Western Empire, amongst others, at Ravenna, in Italy, also as forming part of the Prætorian guard.

* In the year 425 A.D., a war was waged in the north of Italy between the eastern and western Empire. Dathi's march to the Alps may have been to support the Emperor John in this war. The date of Dathi's death is 428 A.D., which brings the two events sufficiently into contiguity. Indeed, classical evidence is nearly as tantalizing as Irish for this period. These two centuries require to be thoroughly overhauled. Gibbon did his work here in a very lazy fashion.

CHAPTER VII.

AGE OF ST. PATRICK.

THE age at which we are now arrived is, from a historical point of view, one of the very greatest interest. Unfortunately the obscurity in which it is involved is so great that the historian can perceive few definite facts, and for the rest only the large and general features of the times. In spite of occasional wars the authority of Tara and Tara's King was recognised over Ireland, producing a solidarity not indeed comparable to that to which modern history has accustomed us, but still considerable and real, and, I believe, far superior to that which prevailed in succeeding centuries. That national union which was primarily due to the proximity of Rome and the settled governments of adjoining countries had been increased and strengthened by the external wars and conquests of Crimthann, Niall Mór, and Dathi, while the disintegrating effects of Rome's decay, and which influenced all European nations, had not yet been felt.

The Picts were at this time feudatory to the Irish King, the Saxons were friendly and in alliance, and there seems to have been a considerable direct Irish military occupation of the west of Britain. The Welsh historians* and antiquarians admit an Irish occupation of their country preceding its conquest by Cunedda and his sons.

But that the Irish power in Britain was far more

* Edward Llwyd, Ritson, Rev. W. B. Jones. The Irish invasion is mentioned in the Welsh Triads.—See *Vestiges of the Gæl in Gwynedd*. Supplement to *Archæologia-Cambrensis* for 1850.

considerable, is not only antecedently probable from what we know of the general course of events during the latter part of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century, but is also proved by the terms of the letter despatched in vain by the Britons to the Roman, *Ætius*, and which was written and sent about the year 430 A.D. Dathi died in the year 428 A.D., and of his successors, the Irish historians have recorded no foreign expeditions, from which, coupled with the information derived from the subjoined* epistle, it is plain that the tributary condition to which the Hiberno-Pictic confederacy had reduced Britain continued uninterrupted for at least a generation, requiring no new wars of an extensive character for its support. In fact, the hegemony of Ireland in the British islands, commenced by Crimthann, carried forward and extended by Niall, and maintained by Dathi and his son, Amalgad, was upheld by its own weight and prestige for an additional generation, and then gradually crumbled away and dissolved, chiefly, I believe, owing to disintegrating processes at home, which were not only natural to the age but were still further accelerated by the moral disunion caused by the advent and growth of Irish Christianity and the wars and disunions caused by the introduction of a new faith and a new order of ideas.

To Dathi succeeded, 428 A.D., *Lægairey*, son of the great Niall. He was slain, according to the annalists, in 458 A.D., by the Sun and Wind, between two

* "The barbarians drive us into the sea, the sea back upon the barbarians; thus tossed to and fro between two deaths we perish by sword or by water."

That the barbarians were still the Irish and the Picts, chiefly the former, we know from *Gildas*.

mountains, Erin and Alba, situated somewhere on the banks of the Liffey :—

“The elements of God, whose guarantee he had violated,
Inflicted the doom of death upon the King.”*

Lægairey had been taken prisoner by the Leinster men while collecting the Boromean tribute, and to procure his release had sworn by Sun and Wind that he would never again renew the hateful impost. Having recovered his freedom he sacrilegiously invaded Leinster at the head of an army, and raised upon the inhabitants the Boroma first exacted by Tuhall Tectmar. All history shows that powerful nations do not hesitate to break through treaties contracted with weaker foes. Thus the Roman Senate repudiated the compact made between the Samnites and their own General at the Caudine Forks, and as late as 1691 A.D., Imperial cynicism and love of power added one more to the great crimes of history.

The confederacy which supported Lægairey and the Ard-Rieship, and which shared with him the great Boromean tribute, refused to ratify his private undertaking, suggesting to him doubtless, as ambition and greed backed by overweening military power always will, sophistical reasons why such an engagement should not bind, and induced or compelled him once more to invade Leinster and enforce the ancient prerogative of his ancestors. Doubtless, had Lægairey refused to obey his feudatories, the great confederacy of which he was the head would have supplanted him, which, of course, is but a palliation, not an excuse.

* “Four Masters,” p. 145.

But there is this proof of the existence of a public conscience, a conscience formulated in the ethnic and pre-Christian ages, that conscience which underlies and makes sublime and ever-interesting the great heroic literatures of Ireland, that if the crime was monumental so too was its condemnation. The Irish bards and the monks who followed them and adopted their views and feelings, have set down in the annals a great crime, and attached to it a great stigma. The crime, its punishment, and its condemnation stand out clearly in the chronicles as a solemn warning and example to all treacherous and treaty-breaking Kings. The Sun and the Wind slew the Irish Ard-Rie because he had broken faith with his enemies and taken their name in vain.

An ancient Greek meditating the infraction of a solemn contract consulted the Pythian prophetess as to whether an oath, *Horcus*, would, if violated, be powerful to avenge his outraged *numen*. To which the priestess replied that *Horcus* himself was powerless, but that to him was a son swift without feet, a warrior without hands, who to the ends of the earth would pursue and drag down the sacrilegious wretch by whom his father had been outraged.

Such as this noble apologue to the Greeks must have been to the kings and princes of Ireland, that great crime and great condemnation of Lægairey mac Niall, the first Christian monarch of the isle.

Lægairey was buried at Tara, in the southern rampart or circumvallation of the great Rath, once named the Rath of Cro-Finn, a De Danān goddess, but from him afterwards called Rath Lægairey. This great Rath, covering about an acre of ground, is still

separable and distinguishable from the surrounding country. At one point the stone wall is still apparent, that portion of it which is not overgrown with grass being still some ten feet high.

Lægairey was by his own request interred erect, clad in complete armour, with his weapons beside him and his face set southward against the Leinster men.

His name also remains elsewhere in the topography of the island. He fortified the port now called Kingstown Harbour, but which from him was called Dûn Lægairey, or Dunleary. The name remains as that of one of the two divisions of the harbour of Kingstown.

It was in the fifteenth year of the reign of this King that St. Patrick reached Ireland, coming not now as a slave, but as a bishop, the first ever despatched, at least from Rome, or by the Pope of Rome to Ireland.
Ad Scotos in Christum credentes primus episcopus.

Contemporary with St. Patrick was one of the most celebrated Irish bards, Dûvac mac Ua Lugair, *i.e.*, Dûvac, son of the grandson of Lugair, in whose name the reader will perceive how intimately genealogical ideas penetrate the civilization of the age. Thus the mere name of this provincial poet recalls five generations. Dûvac was the family bard of Crimthann, that Leinster King who took Lægairey prisoner. In one of those fine bardic poems written by Dûvac, and whose authenticity Irish scholarship* admits, we have

* See O'Curry's MS. Materials, pp. 482 *et seq.*, and, as the last, and probably the best authority, Professor Atkinson, see preface to the Book of Leinster, a photo-zincographic copy of which has been published under the superintendence of the Royal Irish Academy by the Commissioners for the publication of National Manuscripts.

internal testimony of the dignified position occupied by Irish bards in the fifth century. He there describes the extent of the possessions which he held in feofdom to his King, setting them out by metes and bounds, and with imaginative and striking ideas :—

“ He (Crimthann) bestowed upon me a slow hairy* steed
Which seeks not to stale,
Because I was deprived of that other on which I had been
set,
And which to me had been appointed.

I say that it will be under me to the end of the world,
The reward of my poem,
And that it is a horse of land and country,
Variegated, green.

There are three humps upon his body,
Sea-bound, slow-waved,
Torchair—it is not a soft wave that threatens it,
Formæl, Fordruin.

His tail is at Bana the red-mixed
Against the high cliff,
Stiff his noisy wave, his head
In the noisy wave of the sea.

Would you know the breadth of the land
Upon which we shall settle,
From the Torrent of the Roar with which we mere
To Moy Serad.

This broad-backed Pegasus of the poet represented an estate in the county of Wexford, stretching from the River Bann to the Sea, and from the river of Owen-gorman† to that of Ounavarra.

* Probably this epithet stands for “woody.”

† This is a corrupted form of the Celtic word signifying the Stream of

The fact that the great Red Branch cycle had been formulated in the time of Dúvac is attested by the following verses :—

“ Fergus Mac Roy, also of the Ultonians—
Of the gallant deeds,
It was Aileel, son of Ross Roe,
He found to kill him.

The Three Red-Heads* were of Leinster,
A valiant cluster,
They slew Lewy,† and Conairy,
And Conaill.‡

Erc§ the son of Cairbry, famed King of Erin,
With his multitude,
Stoutly the fair-haired prince smote his head
From Cuculain.”

These are, as I have admitted, unhistoric personages, but the following verse will be of use in the inquiry which I project, as to the commencement of credible Irish history :—

“ Eocha Kinsalah, the son of Enna,
Was a prosperous King.
He killed Niall, the binder of hostages,
Son of Eocha.”

The historical existence of Niall, the extent of his

the roar (Roaring-water). The roar was given, not by the stream, but by the waves of the sea rolling up the long, sandy beach where the Owengorman meets the sea.—See MS. Materials, p. 482 *et seq.*

Torchair, one of the three humps, is now Torchill.

* These are those three Red Horsemen who preceded Conairy Mór to the Bruidin Da Derga.—See p. 194.

† The foster-son of Cuculain.—See p. 242.

‡ Conaill Carna.—See *passim* Red Branch Cycle.

§ See p. 241. With Erc was associated Lewy mac Conrol.

authority implied in the expression—binder of hostages, the fact that he was son of Eocha (Moymodōn), and that he was slain by Eocha Kinsalah, are thus attested by an all but contemporary author.

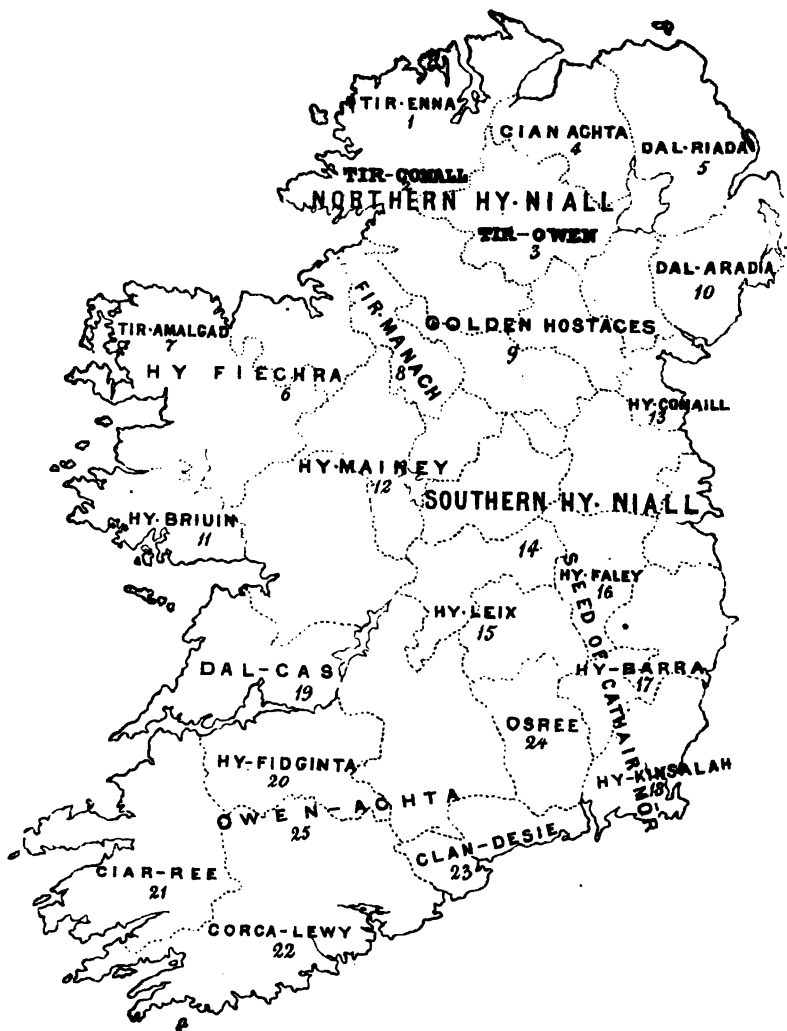
Of himself, Dúvac says that he first erected a stone-cross and an oratory, *i.e.*, in that part of Leinster, and that it was his breast-plate which was around his King, Crimthann, in the battle of Ocha. The breast-plate here referred to was, I believe, an incantation or metrical charm similar to that half pagan prayer called the Lorica of St. Patrick.

Lægairey mac Niall was succeeded by Aileel Molt, son of Dathi. Aileel was slain 479 A.D., in the battle of Ocha, by the Leinster men under Crimthann, by the aid, as Dúvac thinks, of his poetico-druidic genius.

Crimthann, his own King, he describes as—

“The splendid countenance above the Leinster men
Of the broad-bordered Liffey.”

This battle of Ocha shall be to us the vanishing point of the history of bardic, pagan, unregenerate Ireland. Henceforward the chief interest settles in the monasteries and schools. The hero retires, and the saint and the scholar cross the stage.



CHAPTER VIII.

MAP SHOWING CHIEF DYNASTIC HOUSES OF FIFTH AND SIXTH CENTURIES.

(1) Tir-Enna, Territory of Children of Enna, son of Niall the Great.

(2) Tir-Conall, Territory of Children of Conall Gulban, son of Niall. From this family sprung the O'Donnals of mediæval history. Conall was slain in battle A.D. 464.

(3) Tir-Owen, Territory of Children of Owen, son of Niall. Hence the modern name of the county of Tyrone.

These families constitute the northern Hy-Niall, or posterity of Niall. The Hy-Niall constituted the Royal family of Ireland, supplying all the Ard-Ries of mediæval ages.

(4) Cian-achta, the posterity of Cian, son of Aileel Olúm. They were of Heberian, or Munster origin, and were established in Ulster by Cormac mac Art.—See p. 311.

(5) Dal-Riada, the posterity of Cairbry Riada,* son of Conairy II., Rex Hiberniæ, A.D. 145. Thus they belonged to that great race of the Heroic ages, the Ernai, or Clan Dēga, driven† out of the west of Ulster by the Ultonians, re-appearing in the south as the dominant family there, giving these two Kings to all Ireland, Eterskel and his son Conairy Mōr‡ the First,

* P. 290.

† P. 184.

‡ P. 192.

subsequently submerged in the south but re-appearing in the east of their original province. Thence crossing the Moyle, they conquered the west, and, finally, the whole of Caledonia, and became the ancestors of the Scottish Kings of mediæval times.

(6) Hy-Fiechra, Children of Fiechra,* brother of Niall, and father of Dathi, Rex Hiberniæ, 405 A.D.

(7) Tir-Amalgad,† country of Children of that Amalgad, son of Dathi, who, from the confines of Italy, brought into Erin the ashes of his father. They are thus a branch of the Hy-Fiechra. The name is still preserved in that of the barony of Tirawley, the *m* and the *d* having since grown silent.

(8) Fir Manach, hence Fermanagh. Owen, son of Durthecht, a champion of the Red Branch, ruled the Fir Manach in the age of Cuculain.

(9) The Golden Hostages, Or-gialla. This great, but not royal House, were descendants of the three Collas who in the year 331 A.D., after the battle of Acha-Leth-Derg, enthroned themselves on the ruin of the Red Branch, Colla Uas, Colla Meann, and Colla Da Crioich, grandsons of Cairbry of the Liffey.

(10) Dal-Aradia, the Latinised form of Dal-Araidh, *i.e.*, the Children of Fiecha Araidh, King of this country, A.D. 277. The Dal-Aradians formed a remnant of the great Red Branch, expelled thither by the three Collas. They claimed descent neither from Concobar mac Nessa nor Cuculain, but from the champion, Conaill Carna.

(11) Hy-Briuin, Children of Brian, brother of Niall the Great.

* P. 404.

† P. 411.

It will be thus seen how powerful must have been Eocha Moymodōn, whose three sons, Niall, Fiechra, and Brian became ancestors of such great Houses.

(12) Hy-Mainey, Children of Mainey Mōr, a descendant of one of the three Collas, Colla Da Crioch.

(13) Hy-Conaill, the Children of Conaill Carna, a sept of the Red Branch, who retained the more ancient designation, while their northern kinsfolk in the county of Down took a new name.

(14) Southern Hy-Niall. This family sprang from Lægairey, son of Niall, King of Ireland, A.D. 428.

(15) Hy-Leix, Children of Leix Land-Mōr, i.e., of the Great Sword, son of Conaill Carna. They were planted* in this territory by Felimy Rectmar, father of Conn, circa A.D. 115.

(16) Hy-Faley, Children of Rossa Faley, eldest son of Cathair Mōr, King of Ireland, A.D. 120. From them the powerful mediæval family of O'Connor Faley.

(17) Hy-Barra, Children of Dairy Barra, son of Cathair Mōr.

(18) Hy-Kinsalah, a family founded by Enna Kinsalah, a descendant of Fiecha the Lane, youngest son of Cathair Mōr.—For Cathair Mōr and his sons, see p. 268, *et seq.*

(19) Dal-Cas, posterity of Cormac Cas,† son of Aileel Olûm, slain in the battle of Moy Mucreema, A.D. 182.

(20) Hy-Fidginta, Children of Eocha Fidginta, father of Crimthann,‡ that warlike Irish King, who in conjunction with the Picts and Saxons overran all Britain, A.D. 368.

* P. 267.

† P. 298.

‡ P. 380. The tomb of Crimthann is in the Cratloe mountains.

(21) Ciar-ree—hence Kerry—the seed of Ciar, son of Fergus mac Roy, Queen Meave's great Captain in the Heroic wars. They had conquered the Ernai, the oldest of the Munster races, but themselves yielded to the descendants of Aileel Olúm.

(22) Corca Lewy, the race of Lewy the Poet, son of Ith, one of the heroes of the mythical Milesian invasion.

(23) Clan Desie, the Family of Fiecha Finn, brother of Conn of the Hundred Fights. When their tribe name of Desie originated I do not know. They were expelled* out of Meath by their cousin Cormac mac Art, but rose to a high position again in the south of Ireland.

(24) Osree, *i.e.*, the Ossorians, or people of Ossory. Angus Osree, a contemporary of Cormac mac Art seems to have founded the House.

(25) Owen-achta, posterity of Owen,† son of Aileel Olúm, slain at battle of Mah Mucreema, fighting on the side of Art against Lewy mac-Con.

The sovereignty of Munster alternated between the House of Cas in North Munster, or Thomond, and that of Owen in South Munster, or Desmond.

* P. 311.

† P. 298. Their name remains in that of two baronies in Waterford, Decies Within and Decies Without.

PART XIII.

Verification of the Irish Bardic History; how far Reliable, Doubtful, and Mythical.

CHAPTER I.

EARLIEST TESTIMONY PROCURABLE.

IN this part I purpose to retrace the path by which we have just come, and to ascertain to what extent we have been traversing a region of authentic history, and to what extent mere cloud-land, the enchanted world of poetic tradition, and religious or heroic myth. Even if the whole of the foregoing narrative should be found to belong to the world of mythology and unverifiable tradition, I think that, for reasons* which I have already advanced, no philosophical student will regret the extent to which it has been treated by me. But such is not the case, for I believe I can fairly show that the main current of bardic history is verifiable or credible to a point centuries behind the date to which I have in this volume deduced it.

In the year 563 A.D., St. Columba, passing over from Ireland to Alba,† founded the Monastery of Iona,

* Part iii.

† Gaelic appellation of Caledonia.

which rapidly rose to be the chief religious centre of the north-west of Europe.

In the following century, St. Adamnan, abbot of the monastery, one of the principal European figures of the age, and who was mainly instrumental in bringing about the subjection of the British churches to the See of Rome, churches which at that time were inclined to follow the leadership of the independent Church of Ireland, wrote a life of St. Columba, which stands as the master-piece of mediæval biography, composed in exquisite Latin, and evincing a sober, cautious and philosophical spirit unusual in that age. When he does record anything marvellous with regard to St. Columba, we always perceive clearly the exact nature of the incident, which in those wonder-loving times received a very slight mythical form before reaching the biographer. Making a small deduction on this account, what refers to St. Columba may be accepted as true. The statements of Adamnan are the statements of Columba himself, of Columba's contemporaries and friends, and of the monastic brotherhood of Iona. Adamnan, as he asserts, conversed with men who knew Columba, the saint being himself the most remarkable individual of the age, and first-cousin of three Kings of all Ireland, therefore, one about whose birth and ancestry there could be no doubt.

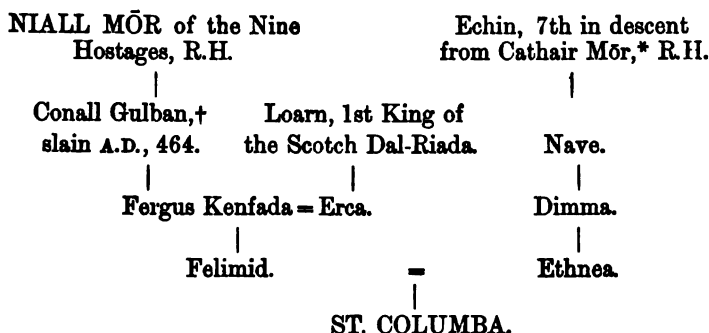
In this biography Adamnan alludes to Columba as a descendant of Niall, *i.e.*, Niall Mór of the Nine Hostages, R. H.*—378 A.D.

The pedigree of St. Columba, for which we have

* Indeed it is St. Columba himself who refers to his ancestor Niall. See Reeves' Edition, p. 93.

† Reeves' Edition, p. 8.

the testimony of the whole Irish Church, supported incidentally by Adamnan, is thus given :—



The foregoing is casually verified by Adamnan, who mentions Felimid and Fergus on the paternal, and Ethnea, Dimma and Nave on the maternal, pursuing the pedigree no further than was necessary to bring it into connection with great and well-known personages in the history. The whole of St. Columba's life was in the full glare of contemporary history.

To this, add the all but contemporary evidence of *Dâvac mac Ua Lugair*, p. 419, verifying the bardic history as regards this monarch, and also verifying his father *Eocha Moymodôn*.

We have here the testimony of a bard contemporary with St. Patrick, and of the chief monastery in the west of Europe, of the founder and his friends, thus accidentally verified by Adamnan as to the historical existence of Niall, who by the bardic historians was surnamed "the Great," and "Of the Nine Hostages,"

* See Part x., chap. 3.

† Founder of the Cinel Conall, the ruling family of the north-west of Ireland, a territory conterminous with Co. Donegal.—See Map.

and represented as wielding an almost imperial power in this quarter of Europe.

But for these undesigned and accidental verifications, careless and uncritical inquirers not understanding the genius of the bardic literature, and finding the bardic history of Niall intermingled with strange mythical decorations and supported by no positive testimony, would at once refer him to the region of the unhistorical. This should teach us extreme caution in the rejection of tradition or of ancient historical literature merely because it cannot be authenticated* or verified.

The existence of Niall and of his position in time,† *teste* St. Columba's pedigree, being beyond question, his character and the place he filled in his age remains for consideration.

From Adamnan we learn that the family of Niall was the most illustrious in the time of St. Columba, and that the Ard-Rieship of Ireland was confined to members of this family. The extent and power of the Ard-Rieship in the sixth century is shown from the same source in various ways, all incidental and undesigned. Thus, Skandal, King of Ossory, for some offence incurred the displeasure of Diarmait, the Monarch. The Ard-Rie marched into Leinster, took him captive, dethroned and for several years imprisoned him in the north. He subsequently, apparently at the instigation

* Let the reader remember that the verification of Roman history dates no further back than the second Punic War, i.e., the age of Fabius Pictor and Cincius Alimentus, the first historians.

† The exact date even must be accepted, St. Patrick having been in Ireland during his reign, not to mention the evidence further on, adduced as to the degree of culture and civilization existing in Ireland in the fourth century.

of St. Columba, who visited Skandal in his confinement, restored him to his sovereignty.*

Between the same monarch and the Dal-Riada of Antrim arose a controversy as to the feudal sovereignty to be exercised by Diarmait as Ard-Rie of Ireland over the Dal-Riadie Irish of Caledonia, to settle which a great international convention was held at Drum-Ceat.†

Diarmait was finally assassinated (565 A.D.), by Æd Duff, King of Dal-Aradia.‡ The indignation of St. Columba at this act is significant of the extent and reality of the Royal authority in Ireland at this time. He utters a terrible curse against the regicide, his wrath having been aroused, not against the assassin, but against him who dared put forth his hand against the King of all Ireland, "*Regem totius Scotiæ*," and "*Regnatorem totius Scotiæ*."§

That large political combinations were in the age is also incidentally shown by the fact that St. Columba, when on a visit with the Pictish King Brudeus, induced him to lay his feudatory, the King of the Orkney Islands, under conditions not to molest any of Columba's missionaries who might land upon his coasts. A King whose arm could reach so far and control the Kings of distant and sea-divided territories was a very different personage from the petty, cattle-

* Reeves' Edition of St. Adamnan's Life of St. Columba, p. 39.

† Ditto, p. 92, note c. St. Columba came from Iona to attend this convention. There, too, at this time, was determined the great controversy between the Irish aristocracy and the bards.

‡ Conterminous with Co. Down.—See Map.

§ Life of St. Columba, pp. 69 and 70.

lifting chiefs with whom we have been ignorantly imagining those ages to have been filled.*

That the Ard-Rie of the Irish, then the chief nation of the British Isles, should have exercised a real authority in Ireland, is thus seen to be quite in keeping with the character of the age.

Now it may be shown in various ways that after the break-up of the Roman Empire the same disintegrating processes at work all over Europe affected Ireland also, and that those great military and political combinations common in the fourth and fifth centuries amongst the un-Latinised nations of Europe were gradually falling to pieces. In spite of his power and authority, so evidenced, it is not Diarmait who is entered in our history as *Mōr*, or "the Great," but his ancestor Niall, nor to him is ascribed in the bardic tales and histories feudal rights over the Picts, or extensive foreign conquests.†

Again : through the whole of that period of Irish history, which being contemporaneous with the monasteries and subsequent to the reign of Niall, must be accepted as historical, we always find the Ard-Rieship of Ireland confined to scions‡ of his race, the pro-

* These facts lift from our eyes a dense veil, and render the minds of the philosophical and unprejudiced ready to accept statements with regard to the foregoing age, at which, under the spell of conventional English histories, we would have turned away with impatience.

† The positive and negative sides of the bardic history are thus supported. To Niall they ascribe foreign power, in which, as I shall presently show, they are correct. To Diarmait they do not, and in this they are substantiated by Adamnan's *Life of St. Columba*, a certain influence over the Dal-Riadic Irish only excepted.

‡ With two exceptions, Dathi, Niall's nephew, R.H. 405 A.D. to 428 A.D., and Aileel Molt, son of Dathi, but these belong to the same race. They prove, at all events, the greatness and power of Niall's father, Eocha Moy-moðón, if not of Niall, their near kinsman.

vinces of Ulster and Meath are their hereditary kingships, while Connaught is under the power of the descendants of Fiechra,* brother of this same Niall.

It is therefore certain that this Niall, surnamed the Great, and in the bardic histories invested with an almost imperial power exercised beyond the confines of Ireland, was really what the bards represent him, Ard-Rie of all Ireland, and one of the most potent who ever held that title. Let it be remembered, too, that Palladius or St. Patrick landed in Ireland, as bishop and emissary from Rome, in the year 430 A.D., and while Lægairey, son of Niall, was King, so that the testimony of the monasteries in general, may be fairly sub-joined to that of the bards; and here, too, the bardic history is amply verified.

The following passage, quoted by Keatinge, from "an ancient vellum MS.," since lost, represents early Irish monastic evidence concerning Niall, *i.e.*, the testimony of Armagh and the Patrician establishments† of the island :—

"At this time the fleet out of Ireland plundered the country in which St. Patrick then lived, and according to the custom of the Irish many captives were carried away from thence, amongst whom was St. Patrick, in the sixteenth year of his age, and his two sisters, Lupida and Darerca. And St. Patrick was led captive into Ireland in the tenth year of the reign of Niall, King of Ireland, who mightily (*potenter*) ruled for 27 years, and wasted Britannia, Anglia, and Gaul."‡

* See Map.

† The reader will remember that there were two Christian Churches in Ireland in the fifth and succeeding centuries, the Patrician or Roman Church, and the independent Church of Ireland, the latter being far the most powerful.

‡ The historical statements in the foregoing refer to events and persons

The foregoing passage may therefore be added as a historical authority to the testimony, direct and indirect, of St. Adamnan, of Dûvac, and the bards generally, and of the monastic historians, and, if accepted, proves the statement as to the imperial character of Niall the Great. To this add the testimony of St. Patrick himself, that he was brought captive into Ireland "with thousands* of others," proving by independent and absolutely authentic evidence the vast and sweeping nature of his military, or, as some may prefer to call them, predatory excursions. The fact that St. Patrick's youth in Ireland was contemporaneous with the reign of Niall also brings this monarch within the scope of monastic memory.

Finally, let there be added the testimony of Claudian, who states, that in or about the year 396 A.D., and therefore during the reign of Niall, "the Irish King stirred up the whole of Ireland" against Rome, and that "the sea foamed with his hostile navies."

According to the bardic historians Niall took hostages from the Picts, and brought Pictish armies with him to the Roman wars. How antecedently probable is all this is evident. The Picts, necessarily fewer and weaker than the Irish, and still further weakened by the Dal-Riadic colony of the Irish, must,

within the period proved to be historical. No temptation to falsify can be attributed to the writer, they are in harmony with the universal tenor of the Patrician biographies, and in harmony with St. Patrick's own writings. The name *Anglia* stands of course for that portion of Britain, at the date of the transcription or composition of the passage, inhabited by the Angles or Saxons.

* St. Patrick's Confession and Epistle to Corotius do not refer to any Irish Kings by name.

if they were leagued with Niall, have acted in a subordinate capacity, and therefore would naturally have given hostages. That there was such an alliance, or concerted action, in which the Saxons too were concerned, is evident from the verses of Claudian* lauding Theodosius for his triumphs over the triple alliance :—

“Of what avail in their defence the rigour of the everlasting heavens, or what the stars, or that untraversed strait. With Saxon gore the isles of Orc were drenched, and Thulé warmed with the blood of Picts: over the slaughtered heaps of her Irish ice-bound Ierné wept.”

And again,† the same poet, celebrating the victories of Stilicho, or rather the alliances and pacts which he made with the confederacy :—

“His work it was that I‡ no more should fear
The Irish arms, nor tremble at the Pict,
Nor gaze along my shore lest I should see
The Saxon coming on the dubious winds.”

The Saxons are not mentioned in connection with Niall in the bardic literature, their operations being directed against Britain on the east, but that their descents were simultaneous with those of the Irish and Picts is certain, and that they were con-

* “Quid rigor æterni cœli, quid sidera possunt
Ignotumque fretum? Maduerunt Saxone fuso
Orcades, incaluit Pictorum sanguine Thulé,
Scotorum cumulos flevit glacialis Ierné.”

The league is also distinctly alluded to by Ammianus Marcellinus.—See Camden, p. 80.

† “Illius effectum curis ne tela timerem
Sootica, ne Pictum tremere, ne littore toto
Prospicerem dubiis venientem Saxona ventis.”

‡ *I.e.*, Britannia.

certed is more than probable. The Irish historians, however, state, that Carinna, mother of Niall, was a Saxon.

The friendly temper of the Irish to the Saxons in those ages is evidenced in the heroic literature. In one ancient tale,* three beautiful yellow-haired Saxon youths are represented as being present at the court of an Irish King, with which compare as indicative of a subsequent inimical feeling, that mediæval poem descriptive of the race peculiarities for which various nations were celebrated. Amongst the rest—

“For dulness, the creeping Saxon.”†

This, then, may be regarded as proved, that in the end of the fourth century there appeared in Ireland a powerful warrior and king named Niall, son of Eocha Moymodōn, that his posterity became or were the ruling houses of Ulster and Meath, his near kinsmen the ruling house in Connaught, and that the Ard-

* Bruidin Da Derga. M. & C., Vol. iii.

† This fierce utterance must have been made later than the year 683 A.D., when the Irish and Saxons first came into collision. In this year, 683 A.D., the King of Northumbria wasted the coasts of Ireland, to the indignation of Bede and Alcuin. It is remarkable that in the same poem the bard praises his own countrymen, not for saintliness, war, music, or scholarship, but “for beauty and love-making.”—See MS. Materials, p. 224.

Of this invasion Alcuin thus writes :—

“Teaching them to devastate and slaughter the Irish nations, who injured us not, but were always friendly to the English.”—Alcuin, Poem. de Pontific. et Sanct. Ecol. Eboraciensis.

The collision of the Irish and Saxon Churches seems to have led to this war. The Saxons received Christianity and Letters from the Irish, hence the prevailing character of English monastic allusions to this country. Amongst modern Englishmen, Dr. Johnson alone, who was well read in mediæval literature, gave frank recognition to this.

Rieship of all Ireland—a reality and not a mediæval imagination—was confined to his line and house. That he was himself Ard-Rie of Ireland, that he exercised a feudal supremacy over the Picts, and acted in concert with the Saxons, that his foreign invasions were executed on a large scale, as captain-general of a great warlike confederacy, that it was mainly through him that the Romans were expelled from Britain, that his date, 378 A.D., being within the scope of monastic memory, is correct, and that his father, Eocha Moy-modōn, if not King of all Ireland, absolutely verifiable authority being wanting as to this point, was at all events a powerful dynast. To these facts no exception can be taken ; they yield a solid historical base for the continuance of our inquiries, the object to us being to ascertain how far in point of time, and to what extent the bardic history is reliable.

Thus the evidence of the bardic historians has been amply substantiated, and a section of our history which would otherwise be referred to the mythical or doubtful is established as indubitable.

Beyond the reign of Niall, I know not any bardic, monastic, or classical evidence of a direct or positive character by which the accepted history may be substantiated. But until the Irish MS. literature has been collected from its various repositories over Europe, and carefully examined, it would be rash to assert that there is none, or until the still obscure subject of Ogham-inscribed stones has been fully elucidated. Dr. Graves, Bishop of Limerick, is of opinion that the bardic history of Ireland will receive support from this quarter. An Ogham-inscribed stone has been recently discovered at Rath Crōgan, the centre of Queen Meave's

power, bearing the name Medf, evidently Medb, the Gælic spelling of Meave, but its age is not yet determined.

Now, be it remembered, that the Irish bards were primarily preservers of family history, and secondarily only, makers and reciters of epic historical poetry. The great and powerful members of the class, those with a distinct and recognised position, were attached hereditarily to the various dominant families of the island. Thus the most celebrated bard in the age of St. Patrick was attached to the family of Crimthann, King of Leinster, and this bard, in an extant poem, describes by bounds and meres the territory which he held from his king, measuring five miles by six. There are also extant certain poems attributed to Torna Eiges, chief bard of Niall, but as scholars have not authoritatively pronounced on their genuineness, I do not make use of them. Nothing, however, is more clearly established than that in ancient Ireland certain families were attached to certain royal and dominant houses in a bardic capacity, and that as such they occupied a high and important position, holding large grants of land. This is proveable back to the verge of Niall's reign, by the testimony of Dúvac mac Ua Lugair.

If Niall had been a petty chieftain, or some minor contemporary saint, and being such, embraced within the period of monastic memory, no one would think of doubting a statement as to his pedigree for several generations found in ancient documents proceeding from monastic sources.

In societies ordered on the strictly aristocratic principle, even where all else is uncertain, the gene-

alogies are reliable, purity of blood being in such societies all but indispensable. The very name alone frequently recalls several generations. Thus that Leinster Bard, Dúvac, has five generations indicated in his name. He is Dúvac, son of the grandson of Lugair. I would therefore accept undoubtingly any pedigree of any noteworthy personage appearing in this period to the extent of some half-dozen generations.

But of Niall, founder of Royal Houses, King of all Ireland, conqueror of Britain, and invader of Gaul, the accepted traditional pedigree to the same extent must surely be admitted, thus, including Tuhall Tectmar, whom I have entered as the first historical King of Tara—historical here signifying that he appeared in or about the date to which he is referred, and in that genealogical order entered in the histories. Between the father of Niall, Eocha, verified by the testimony of Dúvac, and Tuhall Tectmar there intervene five generations.

Admitting this, we have then in the fourth century a great historic king, with a pedigree running back into the first, and we have also an Ard-Rieship of great dignity and authority, whose history is not proveable by direct evidence, but for which we have the testimony of the bards and early historians, that its course and growth were coincident with the descending line of Tuhall Tectmar. The Ard-Rieship, which in the fourth century was a great national institution, did not start suddenly into existence, but grew gradually. It must have grown with the growing fame and renown of some family, for thus only, especially in aristocratic times, do centres of authority

appear and claim rule. If the Ard-Rieship of Erin, a verifiable fact of the fourth century, did not rise with the rising fame and power of the House of Niall, how else and through what other family line could it have arisen, or how, having arisen elsewhere, could it have passed to the House of Niall, leaving no trace of its path. The bardic history indicates the growth of the Ard-Rieship, along the line of Tuhall Tectmar, his son, Felim Rectmar, then by way of those three great kings—Conn, Art, and Cormac, and so on to Eocha, father of Niall. This surely must be the track along which the Ard-Rieship travelled. In the reign of Niall we know that the Irish Ard-Rieship possessed a certain Imperial significance, therefore that it should have several generations earlier, been the chief political and military fact within the smaller limits of Ireland, must be fairly admitted. Niall's predecessor was Crimthann, and in his reign too the Irish Ard-Rieship approached an Imperialism. He it was who occupied London and fought against Theodosius and the Romans.* But if the Ard-Rieship was such a dominant fact in Ireland, and if the civilization and solidarity of the people were such as to necessitate and support a central authority so great, its track and history between the first and the fourth centuries could hardly have been misrepresented.

The authority of the bardic and early monastic historians, which, under any circumstances, I would regard it as more rational to accept than reject with regard to these centuries, are supplemented and

* See p. 393.

strengthened by considerations, to be adduced in the following chapters.

I may mention that Petrie,* the elucidator of the Round Towers' Mystery, the best antiquarian of the last generation, and the Bishop of Limerick,† one of the best in the present, regard Cormac mac Art as a historical King of Ireland.

Let the reader endeavour to imagine a state of society strongly dynastic and aristocratic, based upon the clan or family system, replacing the present democratic and plutocratic condition of society with highly-honoured and wealthy men, preservers of family history attached to each house. Let him imagine an Irish King dominant in Ireland, wielding a feudal authority over Scotland, conquering England, and invading France, the greatest and most potent monarch and warrior within historic memory, and he will perceive how unreasonable it would be for posterity to reject the family history of such a person, and of the kingship vested in him, merely because the monuments of that history were not stereotyped or referable directly in the form in which they might reach posterity to the ages of which they treat.

Knowing, as we do, the nature of the bardic system, and of the Ard-Rieship of Ireland in the time of Niall, I think it far more philosophical to accept that

* See *Essay on the Antiquities of Tara*.

† *Hermathena*, Vol. v., p. 209. *Essay on Ogham inscriptions*. But those who accept these fine scholars as authorities must bring the history up to Conn. In early Irish history every name implies two or three generations, these being always in fact a portion of the name. Thus Cormac is not Cormac simply; there were a hundred Cormacs. He is Cormac mac Art Ua Conn, i.e., Cormac, son of Art, grandson of Conn.

bardic history, in so far as it harmonizes with *a priori* probabilities, than to reject it. Along its course, the marvellous we will, of course, reject, also, to a certain extent, anecdotal details, and the picturesque, and, for the purposes of exact history, positive facts, reliable genealogies, chronology, &c., everything behind the reign of Tuhul Tectmar. There the thin stream of history trickles out from the mist and glamour of an enchanted land, where the chariots of the Red Branch thunder, and the De Danān gods mingle with the giantry of eld; where the purple light of imagination is shed abroad without stint or check; and the creative bardic genius summons forth its mighty shades.

Without any external support, I would ask the student to credit the bardic history so far, with such limitations and corrections as I have suggested; but I shall now ask him to devote his attention to certain facts relating to Ireland and the Irish in the first four centuries of the Christian era, to which, I think, adequate prominence has not yet been given, and which help to correct a certain prejudiced and unphilosophical habit of the public mind, so far as it concerns itself with those centuries. I believe the light which these considerations throw on the centuries in question will render us still more willing to accept that bardic history, which the early Christians, monks, and scholars accepted so implicitly, if, indeed, there were not also in Ireland during those centuries Christian scholars handing down the history side by side with the bards.

I have no doubt but that many writers will contend for an earlier derivation of the stream of history, or, at all events, of genealogy. They will maintain that

the sceptical Tihernah must have had good reason for deducing it to the point 299 B.C., that the gigantic and semi-divine characters of the Red Branch champions, in the imaginative literature, no more proves the non-existence of mundane historical realities underlying them than the mediæval literature surrounding Charlemain and his peers proves these to be unhistorical; that the Atticottic cycle resembles that of Ossian—a floating saga, violently thrust in here. They will point to the underlying harmony once we deduct the marvellous, and maintain that the allusions of Tihernah to what is plainly of imaginative origin show only that he was not altogether dead to the beautiful bardic myths surrounding and idealizing historical personages; that the war-chariots of the heroic age, coincident in time with the war-chariots of the British tribes, and the rule of women in both countries, reflected equally in the bardic literature and the narratives of Cæsar and Tacitus, point to a historical substratum underlying the epics of the bards. All this may, indeed, be urged, and with plausibility, but in the existing condition of Irish archæological science I do not feel myself justified in deducing the stream of reliable Irish history, or even Irish genealogy to a point earlier than that to which in this volume I have traced it.

CHAPTER II.

SYMPATHY OF IRELAND WITH THE CONTINENT.

THE history of Ireland resembles the course of a stream, part of which lies open to the eye and in the light, and the rest, including its source, surrounded by mist. But as from the character of the surrounding country, the appearance of the distant mountain peaks, and indirect, secondary, or hear-say evidence, one may often define with some certainty the upper course of such a river, though concealed; so, this stream of Irish bardic history cannot be ignored the moment direct and demonstrative evidence fails. Out of that upper region, whither the light of absolutely verifiable human testimony does not extend, the current of Irish history descends to us, attested as to its course and character by transmitted traditional evidence, whose value I propose next approximately to determine. How unphilosophical it would be to reject the bardic history of Ireland the moment demonstrative evidence fails must be admitted, by one who reflects, that but for the accidental preservation of those few authorities which verify, in passages also accidental, the reign of that great Irish King and conqueror, Niall, we would now be called upon to fling aside the bardic testimony, and regard him as a mythical personage of pre-historic times. The verification of bardic testimony, which would otherwise have been rejected, renders it more than probable that the historical value of their testimony does not cease with the reign of this powerful and renowned monarch, but embraces

and is good evidence for events and persons lying beyond him in the past.

The prevalent opinion, so far as there is any attitude of the public mind worthy of being described as such, with regard to ancient Ireland is, that it lay somehow outside the European community, and was unaffected by European influences. On the contrary, nothing is more certain than that, as it does to-day, Europe, at least Northern and North-western Europe, affected powerfully at all times the civilization of Ireland, and that the leading features of every age were substantially reproduced here. If this fact be once grasped and admitted much misconception will be removed, and the early history of Ireland will be brought more clearly and satisfactorily within the range of our sympathies.

In one of Chaucer's poems a physician is introduced, giving a long list of medical authorities, which every physician ought to study. All, or nearly all of these have been discovered in the Irish Gaelic literature.*

The scholastic philosophy of the middle ages, which embraced all Europe, had amongst its originators or chief expositors Irishmen, Duns Scotus being the most remarkable.

The romantic literature of mediæval Europe, with its giants, dragons, enchanters, &c., was reproduced here. Within the scope of that wonder-world we see Ireland acting and re-acting on the Continent. Thus Ireland is mixed up in the Arthurian legends, and Arthur, King of Britain, appears in our Ossianic literature. In the

* See Reports of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, Vol. xi., an article on this subject by Dr. Moore.

Middle High German story * of Tristram and Iseult the scene is laid in Ireland, and in the Spanish romantic literature the King of Ireland appears as a heroic figure.

The baseness of mediæval hagiography shed its darkness over Ireland too, reproducing here, even in a more repulsive form, those monkish and other legends with which the lives of pure and holy men have been hidden and overlaid. The darkness and brightness of ecclesiastical piety and civilization glittered and gloomed here as on the Continent.

In early mediæval ages the art of illuminating sacred manuscripts, particularly the Gospels, pervaded the Continent. The Irish cultivated the art more assiduously and successfully than other nations ; if, as is the general opinion of men devoting themselves to this subject, it had not its origin and chief seat here.†

From the fifth century forward Christianity began to embrace the ethnic destroyers of the Empire, and in these centuries in such an intense form did that evangelizing spirit appear in Ireland that the chief missionaries of those ages were Irishmen.

In the fourth and fifth centuries the nations beyond the pale of Rome, having achieved extensive military and political combinations, poured over the Roman Empire. Ireland then, too, achieved internal solidarity, formed extensive foreign combinations and alliances, and broke up the power of Rome in this part of the world, conquering Britain and invading Gaul.

* Told by Gotfried of Strasburgh, but taken from a more ancient poem of the same name, written by Chrestien de Troyes.

† The Book of Kells, now in the Library of Trinity College, is, I believe, considered the best specimen of that art now in existence.

In the Irish heroic literature, dealing with ethnic kings and heroes and a state of civilization untouched as yet by Rome and by Christianity, are reproduced the same leading features which characterize the Scandinavian and German, referable, not indeed to the same age, but to the like temper ; while, more archaic again, the peculiar martial feature of ancient Gaul and Britain, viz., chariot-fighting, reappears as the prominent fact in the bardic literature which surrounds the age of Cuculain. Also the Druidism of the Gauls and the Britons, noticed by Cæsar, forms, after heroism, the most important element of the Irish bardic literature. To skill in this art the bards attributed the apotheosis of the Irish gods.

Travelling still further back we find the rath, the mound, the stone-circle, the cromlech, or dolmen of Continental Europe, more frequent in the soil of Ireland than elsewhere, showing Ireland still in organic union with the rest of Europe. We must then admit that, so far as research can reach, Ireland and the Irish people were not only in sympathy, and therefore close communication with surrounding countries, but that the large leading features of every age were reproduced in Ireland in an even more intense and perfect form than elsewhere. This being so, we will be more prepared to admit that in the first four centuries of the Christian era such a sympathy between Ireland and the surrounding countries must have subsisted as would have reproduced here the means of recording and preserving at least the main features of the history of the country during those centuries.

When we find in Ireland the raths, dolmens, &c., of Gaul, the use of the war-chariot, the bardic confra-

ternity, and the institution of druidism, and, passing forward in time, every leading feature of Gaul reproduced here, it is impossible to believe that the Gauls of the time of Cæsar, B.C. 50, were extensively acquainted with letters, and that the Irish were not until the time of St. Patrick. That we have no literary monuments referable in their present form to that age may or may not be the case. Irish archæology and philology have not said their last word upon the subject; but then, neither have the French. The age was bardic and impersonal, not philosophical. In such ages all literature is objective. The writer or composer is nothing—the subject everything. Thus, no literary work of such an age is preserved in the form in which it is written, there being no respect for the author as such. The form changes, but of the substance it is the genius of such times to be most conservative.

Ammianus Marcellinus, describing the Irish invasion of Britain, relates that Theodosius suppressed the *Areas*, a class of men instituted by the ancients for the purpose of passing to and from the adjoining nations, and of bringing information. He says that they were in league with the enemy. These *Areas* were probably coincident with the first occupation of Britain by the Romans. With such intercommunication an ignorance of letters on the part of the Irish could not have co-existed. Indeed, the onus lies upon those who would deny their use in Ireland during the centuries in question. The fact that we have no literary monuments referable to the age proves nothing. There are no Gaulish literary monuments of the age of Cæsar, and, with regard to Ireland, the peculiar genius of the bards shows us why none such are to be looked for here.

CHAPTER III.

IRISHMEN ON THE CONTINENT BETWEEN THE FIRST AND THE FIFTH CENTURIES.

FURTHER to substantiate the proposition laid down in the last chapter, viz., the extent to which Ireland and the Continent were in sympathy, I desire to call attention to the fact that, for a period of three centuries prior to the time of St. Patrick, Irishmen known and described as such were distinguishing themselves on the Continent, a result hardly possible if the Irish mind were not in those times more or less subject to Continental influences, for such educated Irishmen could hardly have failed to have been in some communication with others at home.

St. Cathaldus,* Bishop of Tarentum, who flourished 190 A.D., was an Irishman.

St. Mansuetus, first Bishop of Toule, was also Irish Of him Adso, his biographer, says :—

“The island of Hibernia was wont to produce families who worshipped Christ.

From which island he derived his race and there he was begotten.”

He was sent from Rome to Toule, in the middle of the third century, therefore, in the reign of Cormac mac Art, King of Ireland.

Of him Calmet, the historian, also remarks that he was “of the noble race of the Irish.”†

* Baronius, Roman Martyrology, ad Maii 10.

† “*Insula Christicolæ gestabat Hibernia gentes*

Unde genus traxit et satus inde fuit.”—Usher Primord. 750.

“*Nobili Scotorum genere.*”—Calmet, Pref. Vol. i. History of Church and State in Lorraine, p. 27.

Contemporary with Mansuetus, was his friend St. Beatus, the first apostle of the Swiss, also an Irishman.

In the third century flourished St. Eliphius and St. Eucharius, with their sisters(?) * all Irish.†

Sedulius, whose floruit was 400‡ A.D., the celebrated Christian poet of Rome, was an Irishman. How conspicuous in his age was this poet is shown by the fact that half a century after his death his works were collected and published by Turcius Rufus Asterius, the Consul, 494 A.D., and probably at the public expense, and that they have been ever since preserved. Of him Pope Gelasius says that he was a man to be venerated, and that he deemed his chief work, the Paschale Carmen, to be "worthy of conspicuous praise." That poem is in hexameters, being a poetical account of the miracles of the Old and New Testament. That he was educated in Ireland, and by the bards,§ is shown from internal evidence. The writer of the article in Smith's Dictionary expresses his astonishment at some peculiar features of his poetry, *e.g.*, the repetition at the end of a distich of the idea appearing at its commencement:—

*"Primus ad ima ruit magnâ de luce superbus
Sic homo tumuit primus at ima ruit."*

This is one of the chief metrical features of the Irish bardic poetry.

* Probably sisters in a religious sense.

† Teste Peter of Marceaux. Usher Primord. p. 784.

‡ Thus at the same time an Irish King was extending the fame of his country by arms in the north-west of Europe, and an Irish poet was giving literary expression to the feelings of the Roman people. Colgan, Act. SS. p. 324.

§ St. Columba's early tutors were also the bards. See Reeves' Edition of Adamnan, p. 137.

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Again, many of his poems are acrostical, the alphabet being exhausted in the initial letters of each line, also a feature of Irish bardic verse, which delighted in such forms of metre as would render poetry more easily remembered and with more difficulty corrupted, evidently a legacy of the ages during which here, as in Gaul, bardic verse was not permitted to be reduced to writing, but was transmitted from mind to mind.*

Other points of affinity will probably be discovered by those who search.

This poet was the first of three illustrious men of the same name, celebrated in ecclesiastical history, and all Irishmen.

Towards the close of the fourth century Europe was agitated by the Pelagian controversy, of which the two leading champions were Pelagius and Celestius, both men of signal piety and abilities. Of these, one, at least, was an Irishman,—I think, Pelagius.

St. Jerome, writing on this controversy, and referring to one or other of the two heresiarchs, alludes to him in his customary coarse vituperation as overladen† with Irish porridge,‡ and says that he was an Irishman, and derived his origin from the Irish race. That he refers

* The antiquity of rhyme in Ireland, and the influence exercised by Ireland on the Continent from the fifth century forward, renders it probable that to Ireland must be referred the introduction of rhymed verse into mediæval European literature. The subject is worth investigating.

† "*Sotus enim est et originem de Sootico genere ducit*:"

"*Sooticis pultibus prægravatus.*"

‡ The Irish porridge of St. Jerome seems to have a secondary if not primary reference to forms of Irish theology then beginning to attract attention. St. Jerome thinks he scores a point against his adversary by calling him an Irishman, the military power of Ireland having then provoked the fear and aversion of the Romans.

to Pelagius is rendered probable by the fact elsewhere shown that Pelagius was a man of large size, but it is also stated that he was a Briton. This objection is weakened by the fact that *Britanni* was used loosely to signify the inhabitants of the two islands, that the islands are spoken of as the *Britannias*, and that Ireland is, by one author, specially referred to as a part of *Britannia*. Moreover, the general statement that Pelagius was a Briton, may only refer to the fact that he was resident there, and perhaps an ecclesiastic in the British Church, at the time the remark was made. Pelagius is the Latinised form of the Celtic *Muir-gen*, i.e., sea-born. On the whole I think it more probable that Pelagius, rather than Celestius, is that heresiarch referred to by St. Jerome. One of them certainly was.

From the foregoing examples of Irishmen who in the first four centuries achieved high distinction on the Continent, we must infer, in the first place, that there must have been many other Irishmen abroad during those ages who did not achieve distinction, and also, that there must have been a considerable coming into and going from Ireland on the part of such Irish as had time and money to spend on travel.

Moreover, the fact, that immediately after the age of St. Patrick, the date of whose landing in Ireland is 431* A.D., there appears in Ireland a powerful and dominant Irish Church, not in sympathy with him or with the Roman Church which he represented, proves conclusively what from other reasons we would accept as probable, that in the third and fourth centuries

* I regard Palladius and St. Patrick as identical.

Ireland was being leavened with Christian influences, and that the independent Church of Ireland being sown and tended there, which produced that self-reliant Irish ecclesiastical organization which Rome and St. Patrick were unable to suppress or to assimilate.

CHAPTER IV.

INTELLECTUAL POWER OF THE BARDS.

It will be admitted by all students of Irish bardic literature and history that the bardic and the monkish habits of thought did not blend for centuries after the introduction of Christianity. The bards went their own way, treating of their kings and heroes after the traditional method, ornamenting with wizard tales and fancies the chief personæ of Irish history, without any, or with the very slightest* indications that they wrote or sang in an age when Irish Christianity was the chief phenomenon in the civilization of the north and north-west of Europe. Thus two streams of literature and two of intellectual activity, not so much mutually hos-

* In the whole of the *Tân-bo-Cooalney*, an epic relating to Cúculain, the only Christian allusions are the bare mention of the deity and of the day of judgment, which might easily be interpolations or Christian translations of ethnic expressions. The Gaulish druids, *teste* Cæsar, believed in the unity of the godhood. The "day of judgment" is, probably, too, a translation of some ethnic expression. Some phrase equivalent to the end of the world must have been used by the Irish bards; the idea appears in the Edda. The Iotuns they believed would in the end destroy the gods and ruin the universe.

tile as mutually ignoring one another, subsisted side by side in Ireland from at least the fourth century. Indications of the anti-bardic spirit appear in the life of the great St. Columba, where he is represented as having been induced to listen to a bard chanting some of the epical songs or tales current at the period. After his departure St. Columba called him a "homunculus," which may be translated nincompoop or trivial person, and lamented the sorry and unsatisfactory themes which occupied his mind.* The anti-Christian spirit of the bards is evidenced, in the general tenor of the Ossianic literature, which, though as a rule, not ancient, undoubtedly represents the traditional hostility of these great intellectual forces, the one earthly, magic-loving, heroic; and the other spiritual and saintly. These intellectual forces did finally come into collision, and mutually affected one another. Thus, Tihernah is evidently filled with admiration for the great hero Cuculain; and, on the other hand, the bards represented in the later literature their ethnic heroes as having received a supernatural intimation of the coming of Christ. But, certainly for a long time after the introduction of Christianity, bard and monk went their own separate ways, mutually ignoring one another.

Now, it cannot be, that if the early Christians were the sole repositories of intellect and culture, the bardic mind would have advanced so strongly and self-reliantly along its own path. It is therefore antecedently probable that in the fourth century the Irish bards

* Adamnan's Life of St. Columba.

were a powerful intellectual organization, strongly supported, and well able from their side to compete with a body of men bringing with them into Ireland the Romano-Christian civilization of the Continent. The immense mass of traditional ethnic lore and traditional ethnic kings, warriors, bards, druids, &c., which in Irish history precede the fourth century, and which, by the strength of the bardic genius and in opposition to the genius of Christianity, were forced into and made part of the nation's history, proves, I think, conclusively the great power and organization of the bards at the time when the island began to be Christianized.

This consideration acquires additional force from the still extant poems of *Dúvac mac Ua Lugair*, chief bard of the King of Leinster and a contemporary of St. Patrick,* and which evidence considerable literary power and culture.

I have already supplied reasons for the opinion that Ireland was at no time cut off and separated from the large streams of European progress, but was ever permeated by them, and was in harmony and sympathy with the civilization of the surrounding countries. If this be so it might be supposed that the description given by Cæsar, of Gaul, in his own day, might even then, in its main features, apply to Ireland, but, certainly, after the lapse of four centuries, it may fairly be presumed that the intellectual and social tendencies of the north of Europe, as exhibited in a country so contiguous as Gaul, would have struck and embraced Ireland also. The great power of the bardic organiza-

* See pp. 418, 419.

tion in Gaul was that which chiefly attracted the attention of Cæsar, and when so many other considerations point the same way, I think the conclusion rational that on the introduction of Christianity into Ireland in the third or fourth century, the bardic genius was here as powerful as in Gaul at the time of Cæsar, four centuries before. Not only is the conclusion antecedently probable, arguing only from certain evidence as to the sympathy of the genius of this land and people with the general progress of the north of Europe, but on no other ground can be explained the preservation of that immense mass of distinctively pre-Christian history and tradition upon the formulation of which even the monks expended so much thought and attention.

Had the genius of Christianity overpowered the genius of the bards, the ethnic heroes would now appear in the literature as Christian knights. Thus the heroes of the Nibelungen Lied, certainly an inheritance of ethnic times, are in fact Christians and attend Mass. I strongly incline to the belief that the Arthurian are also Christianized ethnic heroes. But in Irish history and literature the ethnic character of the pre-Christian heroes and kings, is distinctly and universally preserved, the music of the literature is set to a key not Christian, and yet Christianity began to flourish here earlier than in Germany.

This proves the strength and independence of the bardic organization. In the department of pre-Christian history their genius overpowered that of the monasteries and schools.

CHAPTER V.

LETTERS WHEN FIRST INTRODUCED.

THAT a knowledge of letters existed in Ireland in the third and fourth centuries is, I think, certain. The considerations laid before the reader in Chapter II., concerning the close sympathy of Ireland at all times with the general progress of the rest of Europe, leads fairly to the conclusion that a mode of civilization so common in the adjoining country of Gaul in the first century, B.C., must have affected Ireland at least three centuries later.

The argument is strengthened and made conclusive by many pregnant facts, without calling in the aid of bardic testimony at all. The appearance on the Continent of illustrious Irishmen from the second century forward is one of the most important of these. Add, too, the fact that the independent pre-Patrician Church of Ireland went its own way, ignoring Rome and giving birth to an ecclesiastical confraternity and organization, exercising an European influence, from which it follows, necessarily, that Ireland was being leavened by Christianity, and therefore acquainted with letters long before the time of St. Patrick.

But the bardic testimony acquiesced in by the monasteries, to which the preservation of the ethnic history and literature are to be referred, is, I think, in itself sufficiently conclusive. If letters were introduced by the Christians, those who have studied the genius of the bardic and of the monastic literature cannot believe either that the bards would have

ascribed a knowledge of letters to the ethnic heroes, or that the monks would have admitted the claim.

Now MS. literature was certainly foreign to the bardic genius. The Irish bards, like those of Gaul in the time of Cæsar, even if acquainted with MSS. and the art of writing on vellum, would not affect them. Thus, there is not, I believe, a single allusion in the whole range of our bardic literature to such an art, although the last redaction of that literature took place in monastic and scholastic ages.

This proves in the most striking manner the firm conservatism and strength of the bardic genius, that their extant literature should have kept itself free from one of the most important factors of Roman and Christian civilization, thereby enormously increasing its archæological significance and value.

On the other hand, that literature, even in its most archaic passages, is filled with allusions to a species of writing called ogham, consisting of notches cut above, below, and across a horizontal line—always cut, never written, and always inscribed either upon timber, stone, or metal. These allusions are so imbedded, or rather spring so vitally and organically from the body of that literature, that no intelligent student can regard the ogham as anything but an essential element of the bardic genius and civilization. Ogham is a fact as inherent in the epics of Cuculain, for instance, as is the belief in the gods, the coloured bratta, the gold brooch and torc, the sling, the war-car, and war-steeds. That the ogham has descended out of the very heart of the ethnic ages and the ethnic temper I am certain, though the argument I urge is one addressed rather to the intuitions and personal feeling

of the student of that literature than to the mere intellect.

It has been shown conclusively by the ablest living authority* on the subject, that the ogham is not an independent alphabet, but a cypher—a cypher, too, with many modes and forms akin in its later manifestations with the runic inscriptions of the Norse nations. He has also shown that a certain cryptic and mysterious character is attached to it in the literature, but to the impossible task of showing at what time it began to be used he has not addressed himself.

The key to the causes of its introduction is to be found in Cæsar's description of the Gaulish Druids, *i.e.*, the confraternity of priests, bards, and judges. Of them he remarks, that though the nation in general, for public and private affairs, used the Greek characters, yet this body, in whom was collected the learning of the age and race, disdained their use, partly lest it should impair the powers of memory, and partly because they did not desire their learning to be divulged to the uninitiated public. I therefore believe that the Irish bards, when they found it necessary or serviceable to employ some written form, invented this cypher. Hence its cryptic character, and hence, too, its weird and mysterious associations, connected, as it was, with druidic secrets and spells.

But that the Ogham was not at least originally connected with Romano-Christian civilization, is shown not only by its vital connection with the most archaic passages of the bardic literature, but by the fact that Ogham-inscribed stones, though often found in Chris-

* Dr. Graves.—See *Hermathena*, Vols. iv. and v.

tian burying-grounds, are chiefly discovered in the raths and ferts, *i.e.*, the ethnic cemeteries of the island.* That the Irish bardic organization, even in the ages surrounding the birth of Christ, should have been acquainted with the use of letters, is rendered antecedently probable by the fact stated by Cæsar, that the Gaulish Druids flourished side by side with a state of civilization in which letters were largely used, and by the statement of Tacitus, as to the extent of Irish commerce in the first century, A.D.†

But dismissing mere speculation, I think it may be safely concluded that in the third century at least, in the reign of Cormac mac Art, a knowledge of letters existed in Ireland, and if the bards did not employ them for the purpose of preserving history, it was because of the efficiency of their trained memories, assisted by the aid of metrical composition.

If this be so, then the main tenor of the bardic history of Tara, its successive kings, and the pedigree of Cormac mac Art, between whom and the first historical monarch there intervene but three generations, may be fairly accepted by minds unbiassed either by irrational scepticism or excessive credulity.

* See Bishop of Limerick's papers in *Hermathena*, Vols. iv. and v.; also Braah's Essay on the Ogham, R.I.A.

† See p. 30.

CHAPTER VI.

RECAPITULATION OF THE MAIN CURRENT OF IRISH HISTORY
FROM TUHAL TECTMAR TO NIALL THE GREAT.

As I have said, the mere fact of the historical existence of Niall, even supposing that he was but a petty king, would be, in my opinion, sufficient grounds for accepting his pedigree in a country governed by the clan system, *i.e.*, a country in which political power depended upon birth and purity of lineage to a point which would include Tuhall Tectmar. But to show that it is reasonable to accept not only his pedigree, but the history of the individuals composing it, shorn of their picturesque decorations, I would retrace rapidly the arguments already advanced.

The great power and dignity of Niall, and the universal attention concentrated upon him, conduces to and necessitates the conclusion that the Ard-Rieship of all Erin was the chief political fact of the centuries preceding his reign, and argued a growing tendency to solidarity. Such a fact being of national importance, connected, too, as it was, with the triennial conventions of Tara, must have attracted much attention on the part of all those whom duty or inclination led to concern themselves with history, while the greatness of Niall and of his children would naturally carry forward into the age of monasteries and scholastic culture the historical lore connected with his family and the Ard-Rieship, which was its appanage. Again, the certain fact that the Irish of this age were capable of extensive military and political combinations, proves such a degree of civilization as would justify

us in accepting the history which the ethnic Irish of the fourth century passed on to the Christian Irish of the fifth.

The mass of the ethnic literature and history which found their way into the Christian ages, and were accepted by the monasteries, proves that there was a hard kernel of fact contained in them. Otherwise the genius of Christianity would have Christianized the traditions and moulded all in accordance with its own nature.

The appearance of distinguished Irishmen on the Continent from the second century forward, renders it probable that Ireland was in sympathy with the intellectual movements of the adjoining countries, a presumption further substantiated by the whole course of Irish history so far as research can reach. If that be so, there must have been in Ireland sufficient education to preserve the history, at least in outline, of the great political fact of the age, *i.e.*, the growth of the Ard-Rieship, without calling in the testimony of the bardic class.

If this be so, then, letters were known in Ireland during those centuries, which is further substantiated by the fact that the Ogham characters are a cypher, or cryptic alphabet affected by the druids, *i.e.*, by men pre-Christian or non-Christian, acquainted with conventional caligraphy. That this alphabet was used at least in pre-Patrician times, is the opinion of scholars.

The accredited and traditional history of the Ard-Rieship has been accidentally verified to the reign of the father of Niall, A.D. 358 ; therefore, when direct evidence fails, it will seem just to accept an authority thus

casually though in part only supported, the presumption being of course in its favour.

All tradition merits attention, but that chiefly so, which is continuous or cyclic, which comes with the weight of universal consent, and which connects itself naturally and harmoniously with a general body of proved and reliable history. Such is the unverifiable history of Ireland, of which the verifiable is but the natural and harmonious continuation. Moreover, the universal testimony in this case includes a trained, powerful, and wealthy intellectual organization, and is that of a people sending out at the time men who distinguished themselves abroad, and of a people who, in the succeeding centuries, seem to have been the most cultivated in the north of Europe.

Finally, this Irish bardic history by the side of or underneath its romantic embellishments, gives a perfectly natural and probable account of the growth of the Ard-Rieship, and of the history of an illustrious dynastic house, of which Niall was the greatest and most potent. In Tuhall Tectmar we perceive the foundation of the dynasty, the seizure of Tara and the Midland plains by some powerful western tribe, the great importance of Tara as a religious and political centre, and the attraction or compulsion of Leinster within the sphere of its influence, typified in the institution* of the Boromean tribute.

In the reign of the son of Tuhall we find King's County and Queen's County† drawn within the grasp of the Ard-Rieship.

In the reign of the grandson of Tuhall we find the

* See pp. 255 & 256.

† See pp. 267.

confederacy operating against the south of Ireland, a movement typified in the epic wars* of Conn and Owen, with always the predominance and extension of the power of Tara, Ulster being still hostile, and allying itself with all possible combinations against the growing influence of Tara. Then we have the first considerable conquests effected by the Temairian confederacy in Ulster, in the settlement of the Dal Riada† in Antrim, a territory torn from the Red Branch in or shortly after the reign of Conn.

Next we come to the reign of Cormac mac Art, and see in the Fianna Eireen a reflection of the institution of a standing army of the Romans, and hear many an echo of what was doing elsewhere in the adjoining countries ; and now, too, another great struggle with the Red Branch, resulting in the establishment of the Cianachta, feudatories of Cormac about Lough Neagh, another territory wrested from the failing but still war-like Red Branch of the north.

Finally, the central authority conquers the Red Branch utterly. Emain Macha is burned or made desert, and the three Collas, relatives and confederates of the monarch, drive the remnant of the Red Branch over the Rye into Down. The hegemony of Tara is extended over the north of Ireland. That fierce nation, the Clanna Rury, or Red Branch, as a royal sept, is at an end. It is evidently at this point we would expect a great monarch to arise, and this is the age at which Niall Mór appeared to dominate the age, and found the ruling family of the Hy-Niall, the Nepotes Niall of the monastic historians.

* Part ix., chap. 3.

† Part ix., chap. 4.

So rigidly are all statements with regard to early Irish history tested, and with such a disposition to reject, that I have deemed it necessary to enter into the question with rather more minuteness and more balancing of evidence and probabilities than historians generally employ. For example, English historians accept unhesitatingly the testimony of Bede, Gildas, and Nennius for events occurring centuries before their time. An examination equally strict of Hebrew history would carry us but a short distance ; and I doubt if Roman history is absolutely verifiable beyond the Second Punic War.

Those who, having given an independent study to the verification of early Irish history, are unable to agree with me, I would ask to peruse all of this volume as a sketch by me of a great imagined history of our ancestors, conceived by the ancient or mediæval Irish as lying behind the fourth century, a creation of the bardic or bardo-Christian genius. Read even in this temper, the ethnic history of Ireland, as indicative of the genius, intellect, and imagination of the race, cannot fail to be interesting, even from a severely critical point of view, for, so considered, it will, at all events, be a notable phenomenon and a portion at least of the history of the Irish mind.

Thereupon, such a student will find himself confronted by a most interesting speculation, viz., how it came to pass that a race whose genius was religious and scholastic should have, contrary to all parallel, projected a great imaginary history of which all the personæ are pagan, possessing no Christian or scholastic attributes, and will wonder at the marvellous

skill with which that invented history grows into and harmonizes with the history which we are now able to verify, and how, being the product of such an unscientific age, it harmonizes with all that we should have antecedently expected.

FINIS.

VOCABULARY OF NAMES.

A

Text Form.

Angus
Ainey
Augh-na-Finshon
Aileel
Alva

B

Breen Da Derga
Bauv
Bove Derg
Basna

C

Celcar
Cical
Cúvac
Cleena
Congall Claireenah
Cormac Conlingas
Crave Rue
Cairbry
Conairey

D

Dega
Dectera
Dary
Dareena
Dairy Barra
Dering

A

Gaelic Form.

Ængus
Ainé
Ath-na-Fuinsinn
Aili l
Ailbhé

B

Bruidin & Bruighean Da Dearga
Badb
Bodb Dearg
Baiscné

C

Cealtchair
Ciocal
Cobhthach
Clíodhna
Congall Claringneach
Cormac Conloingeas
Craobh Ruadh
Cairbré
Conarigh

D

Degaidh
Dectiré
Dari
Darinni
Dairé Bairrech
Diorraing

Text Form.	Gaelic Form.
E	E
Ethleen	Eithlenn
Eadane	Eadain
Einey	Eithné
F	F
Fæd Fia	Fæd Fiadh
Fiontla	Fionnghuala
Finn mac Cool	Fionn mac Cumhal
Far-dia	Fear-diadh
Fohla	Fodhla
Furbey	Furbaidhe
Faun	Fan
Feer	Fithir
Felimy Rectmar	Felimidh Reachtmar
Faley	Failghé
Fræch Milisa	
Fiecha Swee	Fiechadh Suidhe
Fiecha Sreabthinna	Fiecha Sraibthiné
Fiecha Finola	Fiecha Finnolaidh
G	G
Garf	Garbh
Goibneen	Goibnin
Gaura	Garraidh
Graney	Grainé
I	I
Inkel	Ingcel
Irgreen	Uirgrian
Inis na Veeva	Inis-na-fidhbadh
K	K
Kimbay	Ciombaoth
L	L
Lara	Laradh
Lu	Lugh
Lewy	Lughaidh

Text Form.	Gaelic Form.
L	L
Lægairey	Laoghairé
Lueena	Luigni
Lainey	Laigné
M	M
Moy Léna	Magh Leana
Moy Mucreema	Magh Mucruimé
Moy Cruhane	Magh Cruachan
Moy Tura	Magh Turaidh
Mac Cecht	Mac Ceacht
Mór Reega	Mór Rigú
Mid-Láhara	Mid Luachra
Murthemney	Muirthemné
Minemon	Muinemon
Moh	Mogh
Mainey	Mainé
Mainey Minremar	Mainé Muinreamar
Mesgæra	Mesgedhra
Meave	Medb
Moymodón	Muighmedoin
Mueena	Muimné
N	N
Neidey	Neidé
Naysi	Naoisi
Nessa	Nessé
Nia-far	Niadh-fear
O	O
Owen	Eoghan
Olnemacta	Ollnegmachta
Olúm	Oluim
Ollav Fohla	Ollam Fodhla
R	R
Rath Cruhane	Rath Cruachan
Rury	Ruadhraidhe
Ros-na-Ree	Ros-na-righ
Riada	Righ-fada

Text Form.	Gælic Form.
S	T
Shee	Sidhe
Sovarchy	Sobhaircé
Slaney	Slaingé
Shencha	Seancha
Slie	Sligh
T	T
Tân-bo-Cooalney	Taín-bo-Cuailgné
Tailteen	Tailtín
Tihernah	Tighernach
Tihernmas	Tighernmas
Turenn	Tuireann
Tuhal Tectmar	Tuathail Teactmar
Tlatga	Tlactgha
Timeena	Timiné
U	U
Usna and Wisna	Uisnech



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